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"A Stranger to the World": Women, Bisexuality, and Performance in Eighteenth-Century England

Jade Higa

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“A STRANGER TO THE WORLD”:
WOMEN, BISEXUALITY, AND PERFORMANCE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
ENGLAND

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Jade Higa

December 2015

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Jade Higa

2015

“A STRANGER TO THE WORLD”:
WOMEN, BISEXUALITY, AND PERFORMANCE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
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By
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ABSTRACT

“A STRANGER TO THE WORLD”:
WOMEN, BISEXUALITY, AND PERFORMANCE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
ENGLAND

By

Jade Higa

December 2015

Dissertation supervised by Professor Laura Engel.

As queer theory has evolved and been adapted by scholars of various fields, queer studies has become increasingly important to academic understandings of the eighteenth century. However, the broadness of queer scholarship has resulted in specific sexualities becoming less visible. This project grapples with the concept of bisexuality and its relation to gender, performance, and women in the late eighteenth century. It proposes the intersection of queer temporalities and the gaze to develop a new methodology in which the scholar consciously looks back at the eighteenth century through the lens of the twenty-first century. The project considers representations of bisexuality and sexual fluidity in Charlotte Charke’s *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, and Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft*, and it reads each text through popular visual culture of the twenty-first century. Using the term bisexuality encourages a

deeper consideration of both the benefits and potential disadvantages in using sexual identity labels. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the two centuries explodes the rigidity of sexuality labels, genre, and linear temporality. Ultimately, “*A Stranger to this World*” promotes a viewpoint of eighteenth-century sexuality that embraces ambiguity and becomes relevant to twenty-first century culture.

DEDICATION

For Janelle: you saw me through the best and worst of graduate school.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iv
Dedication	vi
Acknowledgement	vii
Introduction	1
<i>I. Why ‘Bi,’ Gender Subjectivities, and Sexualities</i>	12
<i>II. Queer Notions of Time and the Bisexual Gaze</i>	20
<i>III. Chapter Descriptions</i>	27
Chapter 1: Charlotte’s Gun and Mr. Brown’s Dress: Material Culture, Sexual Fluidity, and <i>A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke</i>	34
<i>I. Introduction</i>	34
Charke, Material Objects, and Sexual Fluidity	44
<i>II. Charlotte’s Celebrity Beginnings</i>	46
<i>III. Charlotte Charke’s Afterlives: A History of Critical Reception</i>	50
<i>IV. Cross-dressing and Wig-donning</i>	61
<i>V. Charke and Objects</i>	73
<i>VI. Conclusion: Charles Brown and Jo Calderone</i>	82
Chapter 2: Flirting with the Boundaries of Time: Theater, Bisexuality, and Performance in <i>Mansfield Park</i>	90
<i>I. Introduction</i>	90
<i>II. Mansfield Park: History of Reception</i>	94
<i>III. Mansfield Park: Female Queerness and Performance</i>	102

<i>Mansfield Park</i> , Theatricality, and the Presence of Sexuality	133
The Erotic Props of <i>Mansfield Park</i>	121
IV. Rozema's <i>Mansfield Park</i>	129
V. <i>Conclusion: Flirting with the Boundaries of Time</i>	141
Chapter 3: Witch Hunt: Bisexuality, Labels, and the Witch Figure in Joanna Baillie's	
<i>Witchcraft</i>	147
I. <i>Introduction</i>	147
II. <i>Joanna Baillie and The Bride of Lammermoore</i>	154
III. <i>Violet and the "Witch" Stigma</i>	164
IV. <i>"Are not witches always old and poor?": The Hags and the Disenfranchised</i>	
<i>Spinster</i>	170
Joanna Baillie and the Spinster Figure.....	177
Classical Witches in an Eighteenth-Century Bisexual Context.....	179
V. <i>Annabella and the Bisexual Gaze</i>	184
Annabella as Revision of Lady Macbeth	189
VI. <i>Conclusion: The Twenty-First Century Witch Hunt</i>	195
VII. <i>Bisexuality, Fluidity, and the Messiness of Desire</i>	203
Works Cited	208

Introduction

In the opening scene of Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze* (1725), an unnamed "young lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit" (41) observes a prostitute who is sitting in the corner of the pit, surrounded by a horde of fawning men. The young lady's initial reaction is to sneer at what she perceives to be the base behavior of the country-bred prostitute and her "depraved" male admirers. Yet as the young lady continues to watch the exchange, she becomes fascinated by the prostitute's expert performance and the attention it receives. The prostitute's performance is never described in detail, but the narrator tells us that her performance allows her to "be known to be one of those who come [to the theater] for no other Purpose, than to create Acquaintance with as many as seem delirious of it" (41). Despite initially being offended by the prostitute's low morals, the young lady becomes curious "to know in what Manner these Creatures

were address'd" (41). She recognizes the prostitute's beauty, and she becomes excited at the thought of both being with her *and* being in her place. Soon the young lady determines to mimic that performance and "practicing as much as she had observ'd...she found her Disguise had answer'd the Ends she wore it for" (42). She names herself Fantomina, and what begins as the young lady's playful imitation quickly becomes her sole identity. But before this young lady names herself, the narrator describes her as "young, a Stranger to the World...and having no Body in Town...to whom she was oblig'd to be accountable for her Actions" (41). Fantomina—or, the young lady who calls herself Fantomina—is innocent and lacks a firm identity. She is a "stranger" to sexuality, to depravity, to performance, and to herself. In addition, because she has "no Body" to be accountable to, she lacks a physical sense of self; she is not rooted to a feeling of ownership of or responsibility to a particular physical "body." So she is able to manipulate and change her features and subsequently her *self* as she moves through various disguises throughout the novella. I use the phrase "A Stranger to the World" as the title for this project because it encompasses the slipperiness of performance and gender in addition to the apparent strangeness and Otherness of women whose sexuality is both ambiguous and fluid. In Haywood's novella, Fantomina uses her ambiguity and fluidity to keep a man interested in her body by taking on a variety of different disguises. She seduces this man as these different characters, and—the novella insists—he never guesses that each new conquest is his very own Fantomina.¹ The story provides material for a fascinating case study that looks at intersections of performance and sexuality.

¹ This brief summary of a complex book does not address the questionable rape scene nor the moralizing Haywood's narrator brings into the final pages of the novella. Unfortunately, these problematic aspects of the tale lie outside the scope of this project. For a more detailed look at this novella, see Margaret Case Croskery's "Masquing Desire: The Politics of Passion in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*."

Fantomina rests in ambiguity; she has no original name and no trouble fluidly taking off and putting on identities. Although she is never explicitly with a woman, her chief desire lies in performing the roles of other women *and men*—first that of the prostitute and then characters of her own making. Each of these women have different types of sexuality, and they keep her man interested because they provide sexual variety. At times, she takes on a stereotypically feminine, timid role and at times she plays the masculine sexual conqueror. Her lack of a definitive body and her desire to slip in and out of different sexual roles emphasizes her sexual fluidity. This project will consider how that fluidity can be found in the term “bisexuality” and how that term both problematizes and expands our understanding of female sexuality in the eighteenth century.

This project looks closely at three eighteenth-century works as case studies that specifically highlight the bisexual gaze. I discuss the development of this term in section III of this Introduction, but I provide a brief summary of the theory here. Feminist gaze theory challenges us to consider the implications of the male gaze enacted upon a female subject, and queer gaze theory pushes this idea to incorporate a male or female gaze enacted onto a subject of the same sex and/or gender. Queer gaze theory urges us to consider the implications of queer bodies in the position of the voyeur or viewer.

Bisexual gaze theory asks that we consider how a queer body in the position of subject might gaze back upon his/her viewer. I contend that within the bisexual gaze, a body can be both viewer and subject and that this role changes as trajectories of desire shift. Thus, the bisexual gaze necessitates an understanding of sexuality as fluid. In the way it encourages us to consider how a body might desire other bodies of differing sexes and/or genders, bisexuality as a term is ideal. However, as this project will consider, bisexuality

also carries implications that limit sexes and genders to two opposing sides (female and male, masculine and feminine). In using the term fluidity, I hope to begin blurring the lines between those two “sides” to the point at which they become intermingled and can depend upon one another. In this way, trajectories of desire can be directed toward and received by multiple bodies of varying sexes and genders simultaneously.

My concept of sexual fluidity follows the vein of queer theorists such as Steven Angelides, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, Terry Castle, Elizabeth Freeman, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith (J. Jack) Halberstam, and Kristina Straub. These giants in the field of queer studies, sexuality studies, and eighteenth-century studies continue to push sexuality theories to extremes in order to prevent them from ever becoming stagnant or immovable. Most recently, J. Jack Halberstam released a fascinating work entitled *Gaga Feminism*, in which he analyzes Lady Gaga’s music videos and concerts—which he identifies as performance art—to show how her chaotic, no-rules approach to life can be used to cultivate an evolution in twenty-first century feminism that is unapologetic and unrestricted. This new feminism is dependent upon fluidity, and Halberstam’s theories are slightly chaotic as he embraces the messiness of sexuality and attempts to grapple with events and issues that were changing and developing even as he wrote his manuscript. He believes that it is this chaos—this diving into the unknown realm apart from heteronormative standards—that Gaga encourages and that will mean true freedom for the LGBTQ community. While I hope my project is less chaotic and more grounded, Halberstam’s explosive and provocative ideas are, in part, what inspires the way I argue sexual fluidity works. For Halberstam, gaga feminism “looks into the shadows of history for its heroes and finds them loudly refusing the categories that have been assigned to

them...they are unbecoming women in every sense—they undo the category rather than rounding it out, they dress it up and down, take it apart like a car engine and then rebuild it so that it is louder and faster” (xiv). This is how my project will attempt to characterize the women of eighteenth-century literature and culture that I examine: as ambiguous and forward, as women with agency and power that can dismantle categories through their performance and embodiment of sexual fluidity.

In this project, I look at three specific examples of female sexuality that cross the boundaries of gender and genre and span roughly 120 years of the eighteenth century.² I use Charlotte Charke’s *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, and Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft* to argue for a shift away from static sexuality labels. I demonstrate, through close readings of these texts, how we can embrace fluidity in eighteenth century female sexuality. I also argue that a successful embracing of sexual fluidity will manifest itself when we look back at the eighteenth century not through a Victorian lens—as has been common—but through a twenty-first century lens. The notions of fluidity and movement run throughout this project, and each chapter incorporates an argument for a breaking down of historical boundaries. Using Freeman’s theories about queer temporalities, which I elucidate further in section III of this Introduction: “Queer Notions of Time and the Bisexual Gaze,” I destabilize static views of time in order to destabilize static views of sexuality.

By incorporating fluidity into a study of sexualities and genders, this project offers new strategies for interpreting texts and new ways of thinking about desire in both the past and the present. As I explore the connections between gender(s) and desires, I

² Throughout my project, “eighteenth century” refers to the commonly defined “long eighteenth”: 1660-1830. My project covers roughly 1713 (the year Charlotte Charke was born) to 1836 (the year Joanna Baillie published *Witchcraft*).

introduce new paradigms for understanding sexualities and, in doing so, a new way of seeing the eighteenth century. I use works from three different authors as representative of their three genres because, though genre distinction is important, it is also imperative for us to see that the paradigms for reading Charke's memoir can also be used for reading Austen's novel and Baillie's play. My project suggests that critical scholarship should be influenced by *but not limited by* genre distinctions or even temporal distinctions. My argument crosses the boundaries of genre, time, gender, and sexuality in order to wrestle with the following questions: How did desire work in the eighteenth century? How can queer notions of time connect us to ways of thinking about female desire in the eighteenth century? How can bisexuality contribute to eighteenth-century queer studies? What is the advantage of thinking about bodies through alternative frameworks? How can we expand definitions of gender and female sexuality through an examination of eighteenth-century works?

The three works this project addresses are representative of differences in genre, class, profession, and success across the era. Charlotte Charke's *Narrative* is the project's entry point as I consider a memoir that was written for the purposes of both money and image building. As a mid-century actress who fell out of favor with both major theaters just as the 1737 Licensing Act came into affect, Charke needed to hustle for her livelihood and her text is filled with a sense of desperation and constant anxiety over how she and her loved ones will live. The general public forgot about her after she died, and only in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has her memoir gained popularity among theorists and scholars. *Mansfield Park* was developed by a genteel woman writer. Jane Austen's authorship was initially anonymous and, relative to Charke,

she had a great deal of stability in her life. As a woman who remained single all her life, she did experience some moments of financial uncertainty, but she never lived in the kind of squalor and desperation that Charke faced. In addition, while Charke is often associated with an urban sensibility, we usually think of Austen as a staple of the English countryside. In the twenty-first century, Austen's work is much more popular and well known than either Charke's or Baillie's writing. While Austen is the youngest author this project considers, Joanna Baillie is the eldest and she lived well into the Victorian era. Born in 1762, just two years after Charke's death (and thirteen years before Austen's birth), Baillie was a prolific writer of plays, closet dramas, criticism, and philosophy. She befriended some of the most influential authors of the time, such as Sir Walter Scott, and she was sometimes called the "female Shakespeare." Like Charke, Baillie was involved in the theater, but she presents an author's viewpoint instead of an actress's. Baillie, like Austen, also maintained a respectable reputation whereas Charke did not. *Witchcraft* and Baillie herself implicitly introduce to this project the concept of Britishness, which reaches further than the boundaries of England. The Scottish themes of the play recall Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and, by doing so, emphasize Baillie's role as one of the greatest dramatists of the eighteenth (or any) century. Yet, in the centuries that followed the eighteenth, her work has never been as popular as Jane Austen's novels. All three women were authors; despite their many differences, they each contributed to eighteenth-century culture. The different genres of the texts I examine provide a variety of authorial voices that are necessary for my project because they allow me to demonstrate the flexibility of the paradigms I use. And together the authors and their work represent the expansiveness of the long eighteenth century's society, culture, bodies, and desire.

I have chosen the eighteenth century as the literary and cultural site of the project because of the era's quick and constant growth. The eighteenth century was the age of the actress and the birth of the celebrity. It saw the rise of the novel, the rise of print culture, the rise of the female author, and the expansion of cities. As individuals in the time of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, eighteenth-century English men and women were continuously bombarded with new ideas and new technologies. A general sense of restlessness encompassed England as uprisings and riots seemed to creep increasingly nearer to its borders: the Jacobite rebellions, American Revolution, and French Revolution all occurred in the span of about 60 years. In the midst of this uncertainty and unrest, class systems were falling apart. Particularly as women in the arts gained respect, middle-class and even lower-class women were able—through performance—to eventually gain influence over Dukes, Princes, and even future kings. Concepts of gender were closely tied to class, and the actress's performance skills were calling both into question. Laura Engel writes, "The threatening notion that actresses could effortlessly imitate the styles, behaviors, and liaisons of aristocratic women gave rise to disturbing questions about the identity and value of a true gentlewoman" (*Fashioning Celebrity* 11). As daily society became saturated with the performance and ambition of the stage, individuals began to lose hold of what they assumed were fixed notions of class, gender, and sexuality. While this dismantling of certainty surrounded English culture, expression of desire became slightly more common. Emma Donoghue argues that the long eighteenth century was "a time of intense and fairly open debate on female sexuality" (10). The increasing number of people in the city and the shift in valuing reason above feeling (and religion/morality) brought on by the Enlightenment combined to create an

upswing in sexual activity.³ But this upswing was quickly squashed by the rise of the middle-class and the strict morals of the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, women became an integral part of the English literary community. In *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Karen O'Brien attributes this rise in female authorship to the evolving consideration of women as effective members of society. O'Brien argues that through Enlightenment thinking, the century moves from the Renaissance view point of natural law—according to which women were less valuable and weaker than men—to a desire for more equal standing in society, as seen in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Female authors wrote of their own experience and their own subject positions, and society was increasingly interested in what they had to say. During the Restoration, women writers contributed primarily to the stage and the theater was a potential path to success for both actresses and playwrights. However, because drama relied so heavily on performative elements and it encouraged audiences to look closely at bodies on stage, women involved in the theater had to meticulously protect their reputations. Most often, they did not succeed. Cheryl Turner explains how the culture of writing in the mid-to-late eighteenth century actually widened the options women had to successful and respectable professions. She looks at the instability of other professions, like acting, and demonstrates how writing in the earlier eighteenth century was not nearly as dependable. She uses Charlotte Charke's constant inability to find financial footing as either actress or author as a case study (76). However, by Austen and Baillie's time, authorship was not only respectable but could potentially lead to celebrity and social

³ In *The Origins of Sex*, Faramerz Dabhoiwala tracks the dramatic change in attitudes toward sex that happened in the eighteenth century, and he even calls this era the "first sexual revolution."

status. Ian Watt famously establishes how the novel grew in its centrality to English culture, and Turner traces a similar path but focuses on female authors and their contributions to the development of the novel. While women did write a great deal for the stage, authors like Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood eventually opened up the genres of short fiction. And memoirists such as Charlotte Charke and Laetitia Pilkington began breaking in to the genre of autobiography. Turner interestingly points out that in the eighteenth century, novels and autobiographies were often confused and sometimes conflated. She argues that women were doing just as much life writing as fiction writing throughout the century (32-33). When women began flooding the market with novels in the mid eighteenth century, they were expected to contain an element of didacticism; however, as authors, they were increasingly able to write “without threat to their respectability” (Turner 53). With the rise of the middle class and the Industrial Revolution’s development of faster production in print culture, education and literacy were rapidly expanding. Middle-class readers had both recreation time and a small amount of disposable income to subscribe to one of the many circulating libraries of the eighteenth century. As women continued to write, they overtook the Gothic genre with Anne Radcliffe, the Romantic genre with Joanna Baillie and Felicia Hemans, and the coming-of-age and domestic novels with Jane Austen, Fanny Burney, and Maria Edgeworth. Women also continued to dominate the theater with the most celebrated actress of the eighteenth century, Sarah Siddons. Over the course of the century, the genres of autobiography, drama, and fiction gained popularity and respectability, and female authorship was a large part of this evolution in literature.

This project's case studies are from the eighteenth century, but I am not necessarily concerned with identifying specific sexual behaviors of the time. It is the fluidity of the eighteenth century that provides fertile ground for the seeds of this project. The cracks in the boundaries of class, gender, and sexuality are evident in the eighteenth-century works that I examine. What emerges is a theme of fluidity and movement. With the benefit of hundreds of years distance, we can see the patterns of change and revolution for which the English eighteenth-century is well known. But we would be mistaken if we assumed that the eighteenth century remains in the past. In "Time Binds," Elizabeth Freeman suggests that time and history are fluid. She discusses the fact that history is man-made, and it is constructed using the markers of both the masculine events of wars and the feminine events of birth. A queer history—what Freeman calls an erotohistoriography—is not bound to the present; it stretches and reaches beyond to the past and future. I propose that the queer bodies from the eighteenth century that I examine are reaching toward us even as the queer bodies of the twenty-first century reach back in time toward them. In this project, bringing together the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries furthers Freeman's ideas about the fluidity of time. In addition, the movement among histories enables us to recognize and start dismantling false binaries of both the eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries: namely, hetero/homo and male/female. One of the tools I have developed for this dismantling of false binaries is the bisexual gaze theory.⁴ Rooted in feminist male gaze theory, the bisexual gaze theory provides us with a term to describe a way of looking that moves between male/female, hetero/homo, and viewer/object. The bisexual gaze links my three chapters as they consider new ways

⁴ I explain the bisexual gaze theory in detail in section III of this introduction: "Queer Notions of Time and the Bisexual Gaze."

of looking at bodies within the texts. Though the bisexual gaze operates differently in each work, this project demonstrates how that paradigm can be used across time and genre in order to destabilize fixed notions of the hetero/homo binary within eighteenth-century queer studies.

I. Why 'Bi,' Gender Subjectivities, and Sexualities

While some critics have argued that bisexuality is an outdated or unhelpful term, I use it here to specifically highlight the “bi”—or binarized—nature of the eighteenth-century system of gender identification. As this project will show, this gender system plays out in the binarized sexualities of eighteenth-century literature. Marjorie Garber identifies the issues with the term in *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*: “One thing that just about everyone agrees on is that ‘bisexual’ is a problematic word. To the disapproving or the disinclined it connotes promiscuity, immaturity, or wishy-washiness” (39-40). In addition, the term ‘bisexual’ enforces the false binaries in our understandings of sex and gender. “Bi” (or, in early English “By” or “Be”) as a prefix or combining form, particularly when the prefix has adjectival force, often implies a kind of separation. This includes “in the sense ‘at one side, aside or off at the side’” and “additional, extra, subsidiary, secondary, minor, of less importance” (*OED*). Bi is also understood to be a “word-forming element meaning ‘two, twice, double’” (*Etymonline.com*). Thus, in the realm of sexuality studies, the term *bisexuality* generally has the following problematic implications: 1. It is often looked over; 2. It is often considered less important; 3. Etymologically, it implies that there are only two sexes.

The implication of only two sexes that the term bisexuality creates is the most difficult with which to come to terms. However, this project will continue the process of reclaiming the word—a process that queer theorists like Stephen Angelides, Shiri Eisner, and Marjorie Garber have already begun—by using the work of these critics to continue to build a fresh understanding of bisexuality as a term that can be fruitful. Thus, this project, while addressing sociological issues, is a literary study that uses an amalgamation of lenses (performance studies, queer theory, gender studies, celebrity studies, and material culture) to explore and enlighten select pieces of eighteenth-century literature and, ultimately, the culture that those pieces of literature represent. Although I incorporate my own as well as others' theoretical frameworks and philosophies, my focus is on the specific primary texts I look at and their relevance to eighteenth-century sexuality scholars working from the perspective of the twenty-first century.

Many critics choose to use the term 'queer' rather than gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, pansexual, or asexual. Yet this term is complicated by the multiple definitions different theorists assign it as well as its problematic but frequent role as a blanket label to cover any sexuality that does not fit into the hetero/homo binary. In many ways, "queer" provides sexuality studies with a term that encompasses what we do not yet have language to explain. The term "queer" is an excellent tool that assists the development of new language. But "queer" can also obscure other identities, including bisexuality, due to its nature as an umbrella term. Marjorie Garber makes an excellent case for using the term "bisexual" over "queer" in her first chapter of *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. She agrees with theorists such as Terry Castle and Jonathan Dollimore, who argue that "queer" "erodes the very specificity they consider crucial"

(Garber 64). The use of “queer” instead of bisexual—or pansexual or asexual or others—can cause specific identities to be overlooked in scholarship. For example, in the most recent *Routledge Queer Theory Reader* (published in early 2013), there is only one article that focuses on bisexuality—a selection of a chapter from Steven Angelides’ *History of Bisexuality*, originally published in 2001. Strangely the Routledge reader enacts precisely what Angelides describes in the selection from his book: “In the canonical deconstructive texts of queer theory a palpable marginalization at best, and erasure at worst, surrounds the theoretical question of bisexuality” (Angelides *Routledge Reader* 61). While queer is a useful term that has immeasurably furthered sexuality studies, the danger in this term is its all-encompassing nature. Bisexuality may be a difficult term to work with—particularly because of its implications of binaries—but it can also shed light on a range of sexuality that is frequently misinterpreted and/or ignored. My intention in using the term “bisexuality” is twofold: first, I want to highlight the fluidity and ambiguity of female sexuality. Second, because the term is so polarizing, I use it to demonstrate the inadequacy of our current labels, language, and terminology. My intention is not to affix this label to any single female character but to use the term as an entry point for opening up different trajectories of desire.

This project builds on the varied work on the intersection of queer studies and eighteenth-century literature. The project follows a rich history of eighteenth-century queer theory: Terry Castle, Emma Donoghue, George Haggerty, Karen Harvey, Sue Lanser, Kristina Straub, Randolph Trumbach, among other influential scholars and theorists that have addressed same-sex relations between women in various forms as those relationships appear in the eighteenth century. In Thomas A. King’s article, “How

to (Not) Queer Boswell,” he writes, “I prefer to develop an account of sexuality that neither pivots on sexual reproduction nor can be specified as ‘sexual orientation’”(123). King’s theoretical strategies are similar to the ways in which my project examines women in eighteenth century texts. My dissertation does not categorize women from eighteenth-century literature as having a bisexual identity as we might understand it in the twenty-first century; rather, it explores how the term bisexuality conveys the performance of gendered subject positions and the performance of fluid sexuality. I cast a wide net around my subject matter in order to demonstrate how intersections of performance and bisexuality permeate all aspects of eighteenth-century culture. Therefore, in addition to looking at particular historical figures, I also discuss works written by women: a novel (and Jane Austen), a play (Joanna Baillie), and an autobiography (Charlotte Charke). By exploring a variety of genres, I am able to look at issues of authorial performance, readership, and textual presentation. Charke’s memoirs represent the theatrical boom and budding celebrity of the mid eighteenth-century. Austen’s novel considers how theatricality can be enfolded into the genre of the novel and how elements of performance can be problematized in fiction differently than how they might be problematized on stage. And Baillie’s closet drama explodes notions of theater audience and gestures toward the sexual repression of the Victorian era.

In order to look at issues of sexuality within various pieces of literature, I use the work of prominent queer theorists that have already grappled with questions of bisexuality in the context of literature, society, and culture. Theorists such as Steven Angelides, Judith Butler, Lisa M. Diamond, Lee Edelman, Marjorie Garber, J. Jack Halberstam, and Eve Sedgwick offer complex, often controversial, arguments about

gender ambiguity and sexual fluidity. In "The Bathroom Problem" section of her introduction to *Female Masculinity*, Judith (J. Jack) Halberstam attacks the false binaries of man/woman and male/female: "Ambiguous gender, when and where it does appear, is inevitably transformed into deviance, thirdness, or a blurred version of either male or female" (20). Halberstam argues that ambiguity, particularly when it exists within the imaginary boundaries created by inaccurate labels, appears deviant. While Halberstam's argument speaks specifically to gender, her foundational idea—that a false binary automatically places everything that does not fit into that binary into the space of Other—can also apply to sexuality studies. As I analyze representations of bisexuality in female literary subjects, I argue that bisexuality is "transformed into deviance, thirdness." Just as ambiguous gender is made transgressive by the male/female binary, bisexuality is made transgressive by the hetero/homo binary. This transgressiveness is where the first and second implication of the term "bisexuality"—that it is often overlooked and seen as unimportant—is most evident. Unfortunately, the term bisexuality etymologically supports the binary it is excluded from. This is where my methodologies differ from Halberstam's; my project explores how literary representations of bisexuality embody that paradox and how that paradox can be both helpful and harmful.

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault argues that the subject is restricted to the discourses and power structures of her time, but she also has the ability to slightly alter her subject position by altering her own discourse. The concept of a subject position as it develops in large part through discourse is born out of philosophical semiotics and it is closely related to performativity, which posits that actions and words can call ideas into existence. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler places subject positions, discourse,

performance, and performativity in conversation by arguing that the act of reiterating heteronormative ideological codes is what calls them into existence. Gender performativity, most often unconscious, occurs when our constant repetition of heteronormative ideologies make us a part of that ideology. Also, because heteronormativity is what makes us subjects, we become Othered and our voices become insignificant to society if we step outside of that matrix. Therefore, since there is no possible way to provoke change from outside the heteronormative matrix, performativity that incites change involves using the terms *of* the heteronormative matrix. This is partly why the term “bisexuality” is so complicated. It necessarily operates within the heteronormative matrix and it partially emphasizes the false gender binary of that matrix. However, I use Foucault and Butler’s ideas to reveal how “bisexuality” is also participating in the type of performativity that incites change. My view is similar to Marjorie Garber’s: “bisexuality” is more than an identity; rather, it is “a sexuality that undoes sexual orientation as a category, a sexuality that threatens and challenges the easy binaries of straight and gay, queer and ‘het,’ and even, through its biological and physiological meanings, the gender categories of male and female” (65).

While bisexuality is a valuable term in that it enables us to look at how gender performance and sexual performance both enforce and explode the gender binary, any term applied to the eighteenth century that encompasses sexuality is in danger of anachronism. To avoid this issue, critics who discuss non-normative (or non-hetero) sexuality in the eighteenth century generally use the terms ‘sodomy,’ ‘sapphism,’ ‘queer,’ and/or ‘erotic desire’; by using these terms, they accommodate an understanding of same-sex desire without definitively labeling the subject as “homosexual.” Because sexual

identity was not conceptualized until the mid to late nineteenth-century, scholars need to be careful about how we discuss sexual behavior in the eighteenth century. This is especially true of bisexuality because this term does not fit comfortably into contemporary queer theory. Literary critics and historians have trouble finding a solid theoretical framework within which they can properly discuss bisexuality in the eighteenth century. Analyses tend to fall to one side or the other of that false homo/hetero binary. In addition, female sexuality was hidden or even perceived as non-existent in the eighteenth century. Hence, discussing representations of bisexuality in women is difficult on multiple levels, but it is not impossible.

Because there is very little scholarship on bisexuality in the eighteenth century, I will use the methodologies of those who have studied lesbian behavior in the eighteenth century to unpack the nuances and complexities of sexual representation and the performance of gender. For example, in *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*, Emma Donoghue discusses the difficulties that authorities had in exposing supposedly illegal Sapphic behavior. She notes, “An accusation of lesbianism in this period usually came not as a direct labeling but in the form of juxtaposition of several elements which on their own would not seem criminal: for example, the combination of romantic friendship, spinsterhood and masculine/feminine role play” (11). Evidence of lesbianism was gathered by observing a myriad of a woman’s performances—how she spoke, dressed, and moved on her own and in her interactions with other women. Donoghue—along with other scholars of eighteenth-century Sapphic studies such as Terry Castle, George Haggerty, Susan S. Lanser, and Lisa L. Moore—call attention to the difference between sex between women and sex between men. With the lack of phallic

penetration, authorities are at a loss for how to prove that any subversive sexual activity has taken place. Thus, lesbian sex and female arousal is literally and metaphorically hidden from view. While the work on sapphism in the eighteenth-century is extremely valuable, most scholars tend to explore *either* these lesbian relationships *or* straight relationships rather than examining the complexities of female sexual fluidity. In my study of bisexuality and gendered performance in literature, I build on eighteenth-century Sapphic studies by identifying and exploring a range of female sexualities and attractions.

Terry Castle's work has been particularly valuable to eighteenth-century Sapphic studies, and I use her work as a foundation for my own project. In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Castle argues that the lesbian has become (or perhaps always was) a ghost in society; she is unseen, "elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot" (2). This ghostliness is, of course, largely due to the illegality of Sapphic behavior. In an effort to bring the lesbian into the light and to more fully recognize her presence, Castle identifies lesbians from a wide variety of eras and genres. She writes in her introduction, "if a single grand theme shapes this collection, it is that there are always 'more' lesbians to be found in the world than one expects—that lesbians are indeed 'everywhere,' and always have been" (18). The result of this goal is a brilliant book that closely examines evidence that suggests certain female historical figures and fictional characters could be identified as lesbian. Yet, as Donoghue, Lanser, and Castle herself show, female sexuality is in many ways unknowable or at least difficult to confirm; thus, it is important that we dive further into the complexities of female sexual fluidity. Exploring only the false homo/hetero dichotomy does not fully allow for those complexities.

Works like Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian* serve as models for how to discuss sexuality in the eighteenth-century. In her third chapter, Terry Castle spends the first several pages explaining her reasoning for identifying Daniel Defoe's *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* as "an archetypally lesbian story" (30). Her exploration of the kiss that almost happens between the main character and her female best friend is compelling; she skillfully uses this moment to argue that these female characters are representations of lesbianism in the eighteenth century. However, Castle does not deeply analyze the main character's relationship with her husband. The implication here is that because Mrs. Bargrave is in love with Mrs. Veal, her marriage is just a means for her to hide her lesbian desire. I do not disagree that Mrs. Bargrave and Mrs. Veal share an erotic attraction; yet, to stop there is to miss out on the complexities of female sexuality in this story. We must also consider Mrs. Bargrave's relationship with her husband—was it sexual or romantic? Did she simultaneously feel attracted to him and Mrs. Veal or did she choose one over the other? Opening up the possibility of female desire for multiple genders as it is represented through performance would enable us to more effectively discuss eighteenth-century female sexuality as it falls in a continuum of sexual fluidity.

II. Queer Notions of Time and the Bisexual Gaze

My project uses a number of theoretical frameworks including celebrity studies, queer comfort, and performativity. But the foundational theoretical frameworks of my project are both rooted in the overarching theme of fluidity. The first, queer temporalities, has just been developed over the last few decades. The second, the bisexual gaze, is of my own making.

The notion of queering time follows the goals of other branches of queer theory in that the aim is to question, destabilize, and even dismantle boundaries—in this case, boundaries of time such as linear history, patriarchal genealogy, and intersections of time and the body. For an issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Elizabeth Freeman chaired a digital roundtable full of powerhouse theorists entitled “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion.” Together, via email, they try to sort out queer notions of time, and each theorist has a slightly different perspective. Lee Edelman takes issue with Freeman’s original questions as he argues for a separation of time and history. But Carolyn Dinshaw campaigns for a “transhistorical” connection of queer communities across time. Judith (J. Jack) Halberstam gives one of the clearest definitions of queer temporalities:

Queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence – early adulthood – marriage – reproduction – child rearing – retirement – death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity. (182)

In her article, “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography” Elizabeth Freeman suggests, “queers survive through the ability to invent or seize pleasurable relations between bodies. We do so, I argue, across time” (58). And that “erotohistoriography indexes how queer relations complexly exceed the present. It insists that various queer social practices,

especially those involving enjoyable bodily sensations, produce form(s) of time consciousness, even historical consciousness, that can intervene upon the material damage done in the name of development” (59). Freeman refers to a kind of emotional healing of the body through pleasurable erotic encounters. If “history itself might appear as a structure of *tactile* feeling, a mode of touch, even a sexual practice” (66), then history is written on the body and our perception of time can be linked to a bodily sensation. The past and the present are intertwined within the queer body. This melding of past and present is most evident in her discussion of camp performances as “a fiction of dead bodies upon live ones, obsolete constructions upon emergent ones” or, as she calls this process, “temporal drag” (66). Queer temporalities promote an understanding of time and/or history that disrupts a linear timeline and encourages past and present to interact within our scholarship. Following Freeman’s lead, my project considers sexuality studies of the present and the past and asks, how can a mingling of eighteenth and twenty-first centuries develop new ways of looking at trajectories of desire? I begin with feminist gaze theory.

For feminist theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, and Jill Dolan, the gaze is a situation in which a male spectator objectifies and consumes the female subject that he is watching. The representation of women on film is passive and the male spectator is active. In addition, the representation of men on film is active (the hero is active) while he circles around or moves toward the passive heroine, which encourages the male spectator to identify with the male protagonist and further emphasizes female passivity and subjectivity. In 1975, Mulvey’s theories developed through a psychoanalytic perspective. Although Doane and Dolan both similarly approach their

discussions on the gaze through psychoanalysis they bring theories about the gaze to questions of the theater: they ask, how does the male/female dynamic work in the more present, urgent setting of drama? Dolan also introduces the ideological significance of live theater, arguing that “all the material aspects of theatre—are manipulated so that the performance’s meanings are intelligible to a particular spectator” (*Feminist Spectator* 1); thus, the theater has the capability to be “much more active as an ideological force” because it is not simply “a mirror of reality” (16). She wonders if looking at theater can spark a different point of view: that of feminist spectator, a position she takes on herself in *Presence and Desire* where she elaborates on her ideas about the gaze and includes a discussion of sexuality. She puts forth a discussion of the “lesbian viewing experience,” which involves a “recognition of mutual subjectivity” that “allows the gaze to be shared in a direct way.” She writes, “Lesbians are appropriating the subject position of the male gaze by beginning to articulate the exchange of desire between women. Lesbian subjectivity creates a new economy of desire” (*Presence* 128). Dolan’s optimistic view encourages women who love women to embrace their way of looking and, in doing so, feel free to practice their communal sexual gaze.

After Dolan’s theories became popular, critics began defining the “lesbian look” with more specificity; their work considers the ways in which a woman who identifies as heterosexual can experience erotic pleasure from gazing upon a female body. In *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientation in Film and Video*, Chris Straayer makes a similar argument: the “lesbian look...requires exchange. It looks for a returning look, not just a receiving look. It sets up two-directional sexual activity” (10). Straayer makes a point to identify a gaze between women that is homoerotic but not overtly sexual and not

necessarily comparable to heterosexual troupes: “female bonding is the antithesis of love at first sight. While love at first sight necessarily deemphasizes materiality and context, female bonding is built on an involvement in specific personal environments” (18). Reina Lewis takes a similar approach as she examines how women who identify themselves as straight consume images of other women: “In the ‘all female’ world of the fashion magazine, the logic of a female desiring gaze produces what I call a *paradigmatically lesbian viewing position* for any woman, whether or not she is consciously lesbian identified” (95, my emphasis). Lewis suggests that a self-identified heterosexual woman could occupy a “lesbian viewing position” when she experiences erotic pleasure in response to looking at a female body. Her theory is slightly troubling in that it does not seem to take straight privilege into account; a heterosexual woman could never have a lesbian experience—even a “paradigmatic” one—because she is, in the system of heteronormative sexual ideologies, in a more advantageous sexual position. However, Lewis’ piece is important in that she, like Straayer, grapples with the idea of a straight woman experiencing erotic pleasure through viewing another woman. In Lewis’ and even Straayer’s arguments, the term “lesbian” has too narrow a definition to fully encompass the range of female sexuality that they discuss. The term “lesbian” can be limiting because it connotes the idea of a relationship between women only. Yet both Lewis and Straayer consider how the gaze changes among women who desire multiples genders and sexes.

In the last decade, the original gaze theorists have come under fire for relying too heavily on sexuality to determine the inner workings of a complex spectator/object relationship. Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, for example, argue that a lesbian

gaze is much too exclusive and that determining gaze theories based on sexuality is dangerous: “it seems far too simplistic to argue that who you sleep with may determine how you identify with cinematic images” (35). Evans and Gamman call for a revision of queer gaze theory that considers various definitions of queer. For them, queer representations “may not always be positive; they are frequently ambiguous, slippery, and in total don’t add up to a coherent whole. They often leave the spectator/viewer questioning” (47). My project is concerned with exploring the way these contemporary theories of the queer gaze intersect with and enlighten my own theory of a more specific type of gaze—the bisexual gaze.

While Evans and Gamman certainly come closest to an inclusive gaze theory, their net is perhaps a bit too wide. They use the term queer as a blanket term to cover a myriad of sexualities rather than addressing specific sexualities and their influences on spectator/object relationships. Although they are right to point out that depending on sexuality alone is a simplistic way of determining characteristics of certain kinds of gazes, we cannot dismiss specific sexualities completely or we risk erasing them from cultural consciousness. In contrast, many of the early feminist theorists looked solely at the lesbian gaze and even writers who considered the viewership of women who did not identify as lesbian still allowed their theories to fall under the umbrella of the *lesbian* gaze. The issue here is that all female-female spectator/object relationships are marked as lesbian, when the term does not encompass the complexities of a gaze that originates with a woman who obtains erotic pleasure from watching female *and* male—and perhaps also transgender or transsexual—objects. The term bisexual gaze could help to ameliorate this inconsistency. The bisexual gaze enables the viewer to experience erotic pleasure from

all sexes. The term itself is jarring and forces us to recognize the inconsistencies of claiming there are only two genders, two sexes, and two “ways” a bisexual person could “swing”—as if the bisexual were a pendulum that magically appeared on one apex and then the other without moving at all in between the two. But gaze theory is not about looking; it is about the power that the representation has over the viewer—what the representation is causing the viewer to experience *and* how the viewer feels toward the representation.

Because a cinematic representation is flatter than a dramatic representation, the bisexual gaze plays out best in three-dimensional spaces: either in the theater or in ‘real life’ relationships where the gazing body and the body of the object are both present and are able to respond to one another. In her discussion of film, Mulvey argues that “cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (25); she emphasizes that film, unlike other visual representations, can be narrowly tailored to a specific viewer. But I would argue that drama, fiction, memoir, and the performances of everyday life⁵ all involve a number of variables that could change the relationship between viewer and object. Because the bisexual gaze relies upon the spectator’s ability to move between false dichotomies—hetero and homo, masculine and feminine, it necessitates a flexible viewing environment where erotic pleasure can evolve and the subject of the gaze can respond to the spectator’s evolving pleasure.

Doane points out that some critics, while trying to theorize the female spectator, have “a tendency to view the female spectator as the site of an oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position, invoking the metaphor of the transvestite”

⁵ Or, the “invisible rituals [or performances] of everyday life” (Roach *Cities* xi)

(80). The bisexual gaze poses a similar theory—that the erotic pleasure of the gaze morphs and changes; however, the argument that Doane and other critics recognize about the oscillation leading to a “metaphor of the transvestite” limits the ability to speak openly about how the false dichotomy of masculine and feminine interact with the false dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual. The problem is that we feel we must define the bisexual gaze (and the pansexual gaze, and the intersex gaze, and the transgender gaze) against the male gaze and the female gaze—as if these were the only two firmly established positions. The bisexual gaze is *neither* masculine *nor* feminine. Rather, a woman practicing a bisexual gaze reveals the mysterious space between masculine and feminine; her vantage point enables her to move among a variety of gender-based and sexuality-based subject positions as she interacts with the object of her gaze. My project addresses the presence of the bisexual gaze, from slightly different angles, in all three of my primary texts. Charke introduces the bisexual gaze and plays with it; the bisexual gaze emerges strongly between Austen’s Mary Crawford and Fanny Price; and the bisexual gaze is heavily problematized in the gothic, closet drama that is Baillie’s *Witchcraft*.

III. Chapter Descriptions

In my first chapter, I look at an example of early-eighteenth-century female bisexuality in Charlotte Charke. Charke’s life—particularly how she represents her life in her autobiography—is a clear example of the intersections of performance, gender, and sexuality. Although Charlotte was married to Richard Charke, critics are most interested in her cross-dressing and her male alter ego, Charles Brown. Those she met throughout

the later half of her life knew Mr. Brown and his (her) female companion, Mrs. Brown, as husband and wife. Literary critics have done extensive work on reading Charke as a lesbian and queer historical figure, but scholars who discuss her sexuality tend to focus on identifying her as lesbian or not lesbian rather than consider how her sexuality might be fluid. In a comprehensive 1998 collection entitled *Introducing Charlotte Charke: Actress, Author, Enigma* some of the most notable scholars of the field including Philip E. Baruth, Madeleine Kahn, Felicity Nussbaum, Sidonie Smith, and Kristina Straub explore Charke's sexuality and gender subjectivity from multiple angles. Yet this collection does not address the question of bisexuality nor has it been revisited sufficiently since its initial publication. Chapter 1 uses these essays among other, shorter pieces on Charke to help me carve out a new understanding of Charke as unknowable and therefore desirable.

I consider Charke in light of her celebrity—both the infamy she experienced in her lifetime and her twentieth and twenty-first-century popularity among scholars. Although she was certainly not the most famous actress of her time, her father, Colley Cibber, and Charke's own diva tendencies ensured that she was well-known in theatrical society. But she burned all her bridges and was forced to roam around the countryside and participate in companies of strolling players as well as take on a number of odd-jobs. My chapter looks closely at Charke's vagabond lifestyle and the objects she easily acquires and parts with. I draw connections between the material culture that Charke picks up and puts down so frequently throughout her life and the fluid sexuality that she embodies. Just as Charke takes off a laced hat and picks up a sausage grinder, she moves

from man to woman and—through her narrative—she consistently screens her audience from an unfixed, unclear sexuality.

In my second chapter, I look at a text from the later part of the long eighteenth century: Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Specifically, I discuss how Mary Crawford and Fanny Price struggle with comfort and discomfort as they negotiate their homoerotic feelings alongside the heterosexual marriage market. I engage Eve Sedgwick, Terry Castle, George Haggerty, Jill Heydt-Stevenson, and Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka, who have all examined the queer possibilities in the female friendships of Jane Austen's life and work. In addition to looking at characters from an iconic eighteenth-century novel, I also explore how *Mansfield Park* in particular is closely connected to the theater. By placing Mary Crawford's love for performance in conversation with her sexual fluidity, I show how bisexuality and the theater are entwined in the literature of the late eighteenth-century. Finally, this chapter will be especially important in the context of eighteenth-century Sapphic studies, which have generally looked at Mary Crawford as *either* lesbian *or* straight. By looking at Mary through a bisexual lens, I emphasize the complexities of female sexuality as embodied in her gendered subject position. I also discuss Patricia Rozema's film adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1999)—an adaptation that is infamous for portraying Mary Crawford as lesbian or bisexual (depending on the critic who is reading the performance). Rozema's depiction of Mary is in the vein of how I read her, but Rozema's own perspective also plays an important role in this discussion. In her chapter on this particular adaptation, Pamela Church Gibson notes that Rozema does not want to be identified as a lesbian director or a feminist director; rather, she "wants to evade any fixed gender position, to seek true fluidity of positioning" (55). Rozema's own desire to

be recognized as existing on a continuum of sexuality *through* her representation of Mary Crawford is a demonstration of the link between the eighteenth century and the twenty-first century.⁶

This is the only chapter that looks closely at a relationship between two women. While my chapter on Charke briefly mentions the Mr. and Mrs. Brown dynamic, I focus on Charke's own self representation as opposed to the relationship between her and Mrs. Brown. Also, we know much more about both Mary and Fanny than we do about Mrs. Brown. Chapter 2 looks at how the theatricality and performance within both Austen's novel, *Mansfield Park*, and Rozema's film of the same title help us imagine bodies in fluid motion. The chapter plays with the boundaries between hetero/homo, past/present, and novel/film. In the same way that viewing bisexuality as a paradoxical term that assumes a myriad of erotic feelings even as it separates masculine and feminine, male and female, hetero and homo is helpful, so our conceptualization of Austen's work as *both* written in the temporal space of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century *and also* relevant to twenty-first century ideas about sex, theater, and the body enables us to incorporate a wider, more complex view of Austen's writing.

In Chapter 3, I turn to a discussion on female bisexuality and sexual fluidity on the Gothic stage as the long eighteenth century transitions into the Victorian era. As Fred Botting and Jefferey Cox have both noted, the Gothic as a genre often creates chaos in order to return to the norm; thus, it ultimately emphasizes the heteronormative, patriarchal structure of late-eighteenth-century English society. Gothic drama is particularly fraught with instances that pushed heteronormative boundaries through both

⁶ Rozema's film appeared right at the end of the twentieth century (1999), and in this chapter I will examine how her adaptation is an indication of the movement toward the sexual fluidity of the twenty-first.

the supernatural and psychological horror it inflicted upon its audience. But Gothic drama often also returns its characters to a normative state. This is especially true in issues of sexuality on stage. In Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*, female characters share complex, erotic relationships that accompany a constant struggle for power. Christine A. Colón writes, "For many of the women in this play, witchcraft is a temptation, for it will supposedly grant them the power that they lack in their society" (Xxxiv). When examining the eroticism between women alongside their struggle for power, witchcraft becomes a symbol of threateningly ambiguous female desire. In the end, *Witchcraft* restores a normative state by eliminating its sexually ambiguous female characters via repentance, madness, or death. The third chapter looks at *Witchcraft* as an example of how female bisexuality becomes demonized on stage. The sexually ambiguous women in this play are victims of a literal and metaphorical witch-hunt, and their erasures from the stage signify a larger social desire to eliminate female sexual fluidity. In addition to the few critical articles that focus on *Witchcraft*, I use the critical ideas of eighteenth-century Gothic scholars such as Paula Backschieider, Catherine Burroughs, and George Haggerty who have all written on Baillie's other Gothic dramas—mainly *De Monfort* (1798) and *Orra* (1812)—to contextualize my own theories. I also use the work of critical authors including George Haggerty, Judith Halberstam, and Eve Sedgwick as foundational texts that have already built connections between queer theory and the Gothic genre.

In my third chapter, I argue that the witch is an extreme representation of the consequences of stigmatism and labels. Baillie draws from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and events from sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scottish history to create a tale of fear and suspicion. Her characters engage psychologically with fear and grapple

with the problem of labels—particularly the label witch. What is revealed is that the label witch, like the label lesbian or even the label bisexual, produces real, material consequences. This final chapter narrows in on the problem present throughout my project: terminology. Admittedly, I struggle to find the right words to describe the specific emotions, physical acts, feelings, or senses that my project addresses. Even as the project exposes the vexing lack of accurate terminology, it suffers from that very lack. Chapter 3 heavily addresses the consequences of affixing any labels to a body, but this project is not yet in a place where I can offer solutions as we move forward. Using twenty-first century ideas about sexuality reveals more facets of the eighteenth-century woman. By bringing the eighteenth century forward, we take a step in developing a relevant means of discussing these extremely complicated aspects of sexuality.

By using queer notions of time and feminist gaze theory, this project offers new paradigms for examining eighteenth-century literature. Rather than see the eighteenth century through the lens of the Victorian era or take a new historicist's approach and try to focus solely on the era's own culture, I propose we embrace the twenty-first century influence our readings are likely—consciously or unconsciously—to include. In addition, my project suggests we accept Elizabeth Freeman's challenge to "feel the tug backwards as potentially transformative parts of movement itself" ("Packing History" 743). By reading the eighteenth century's presence in the twenty-first century, we are able to use queer temporalities to discover new meaning in past works. Finally, this project takes on the difficult task of valuing the concept of bisexuality. As a sexual identity marker, this term—so frequently associated with promiscuity and indecision—holds merit in its paradoxical nature. It exposes the false dichotomy of male and female even as it suggests

that desire can be unfixed and fluid. Ironically, my argument is *firmly rooted* in the concept of fluidity—fluidity of desire, time, gender, and genre. The project stretches across history in order to move us forward into a queer notion of the eighteenth century that is malleable and adaptable.

Chapter 1

Charlotte's Gun and Mr. Brown's Dress:

Material Culture, Sexual Fluidity, and *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*

I. Introduction

The early-to-mid 1700s were partially characterized by the resounding success of comic actor, Colley Cibber (1671-1757). Although he was also well known for his roles as Poet Laureate, friend of Robert Walpole, and enemy of Henry Fielding, Cibber is still a main figure in the history of English theater. As actor, playwright, and manager of Drury Lane, his associations with the stage are what characterize his critical afterlife. This is the legacy that Charlotte Charke neé Cibber (1713-1760), his youngest daughter, would both embrace and reject. Charke was born into a golden age of comic theater. She shared the stage with actresses such as Anne Oldfield (1683-1730) and Kitty Clive (1711-

1785), and rising stars such as her own brother and sister-in-law, Theophilus (1703-1758) and Susannah Cibber (1714-1766). This was the era of Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1723) and John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). In addition, the early eighteenth century brought women playwrights into the spotlight. Susannah Centlivre's *The Busybody* (1709) and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718) opened to enormous success. While comedy reigned, tragedy was also an important part of the theater at this time. The great David Garrick—actor and later manager of the Drury Lane—remains one of the most well-known tragedians of the English stage and, as Melinda Finberg writes, “when he died in 1779 a theatrical era died with him” (lv). In addition to the theater, the public had the option of a number of different forms of entertainment including the salacious company of a prostitute or the morbid satisfaction that was found in witnessing a public execution. The body was central to eighteenth-century London society and entertainment, and the popular comedies of that time employed bawdy jokes and innuendoes to the audience's great satisfaction.

The chaos of London seems to have seeped into Charke's life; her autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (1755), is a prosaic form of the busy metropolitan streets. It jumps from moment to moment with little linear direction and even less thorough explanation of the most scandalous parts of her life. While Charke's madcap personality clearly fits this style of writing, she was also an early contributor to the burgeoning genre of women's autobiographies. Her title's close resemblance to her father's autobiography, *An Apology of the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber* (1740), implies that Charke's own memoir is perhaps more deliberate than it first appears to be. Felicity Nussbaum's study on the *Autobiographical Subject* of the eighteenth century identifies

women's autobiographies as "the assertion of a female identity in public print" (xi). The actor's autobiography was a popular genre, mainly because it afforded the public with juicy details about the drama happening backstage. But rather than focusing on divulging secrets, Charke's *Narrative* is a study in her own sexual fluidity. Nussbaum writes, "Charke also invents multiple and serial subjectivities that play among the available possibilities for gendered character in the period" (195). Her memoir certainly highlights what theater life was like in the 1720s, 30s, and 40s, and the hardships she experiences allow audiences to identify the ruinous effects the 1737 Licensing Act had on many actors' and actresses' livelihoods. In addition, Charke's *Narrative* invites audiences to engage in multiple interpretations of her gender and sexuality. In the introduction to this chapter, I provide a sketch of Charke's fluidity, her celebrity, and her interaction with material culture, all of which coincide in the detailed discussion of her *Narrative*, which begins in section IV, "Cross-dressing and Wig-donning."

At the age of four, Charlotte Charke woke early, dressed herself in her brother's waistcoat and pinned a cloth together to create a pair of makeshift breeches. She then donned her father's periwig and beaver-hat and marched out of the house with a silver-hilted sword dragging from her enormous belt. She found a place to stand that would hide her feminine shoes, and she "walk'd up and down the Ditch bowing to all who came by [her]" and addressed each spectator as if she were her father. In her *Narrative*, she writes, "the Oddity of my Appearance soon assembled a Croud about me; which yielded me no small Joy" (11).⁷ This is the first of many episodes of hilarity that contribute to the "Account of [her] UNACCOUNTABLE LIFE" (8). She would continue to cross-dress

⁷ Charke's *Narrative* is full of various format changes. She uses capital letters and italics to emphasize her points. Unless otherwise indicated, her format is quoted faithfully in this chapter as it is presented in her work.

both on and off stage, and although presenting herself as a man results in some amusing moments, these ambiguous gender performances also contribute to the destitution she experiences in her lifetime as much as her posthumous critical celebrity.⁸ Charke's life—or, more specifically, the way she purposefully constructs the story of her life in her autobiography—is an example of a body bumping into the walls of labels and boxes. In her *Narrative*, she represents herself as constantly changing and adapting, but her attempts at fluidity are never successful for long. She wants to be fluid, she tries desperately to be fluid, or perhaps she cannot help but be fluid. But sexual fluidity for Charke is nearly impossible in her society, and we can only recognize her body as 'fluid' because we see her through the lens of the twenty-first century.

Charke's work and life represent her as a body that refuses gender, sexual, and social norms—a body in motion. I propose to use the term “fluidity” to describe this movement. Fluidity implies a lack of rigidity and stasis; a fluid object is “not fixed, firm, or stable” (OED) and thus a fluid body is a body without a definitive identity—one that cannot be pinned down. In this chapter, my definition of fluidity is akin to Kristina Straub's description of Charke's ambiguity: “Whether the sexual ambiguities of Charke's cross-dressing create an undefined uneasiness or lead to the renunciation or acceptance of the word lesbian seems to depend on the specific historical context of its reception. These ambiguities may, in any case, be the ‘point’ of Charke's text, the problem or conundrum to which readers gravitate” (Straub *Sexual Suspects* 143). We cannot seem to pin Charke down with a particular identity or sexuality label. She is neither clearly lesbian nor clearly straight; she could be transgender or transsexual; she may have even been

⁸ I use the term “critical celebrity” to refer to Charke's popularity among late-twentieth and twenty-first century scholars.

bisexual or she may have been asexual. These speculations may appear unhelpful; however, Straub proposes that feminist critics must embrace uncertainty: “Ambiguity is slippery stuff on which to found a politically self-conscious reading practice, and yet faithfulness to the specific histories of sexuality often asks the feminist critic to assess such politically shifty materials” (Straub *Sexual Suspects* 150). As much as possible, we try to be clear and root our theses in solid evidence. But the history of sexuality is messy and Charke’s *Narrative* is full of unconfirmed and non-specific sexual moments. To more firmly establish my concept of Charke’s fluidity, I root my theory in readings of the material culture in her *Narrative*. An examination of the things that move in and out of her life without firmness or stability illustrates the fluidity of her sexual body as it is constructed by her *Narrative*.

Charke’s fluidity is the reason her *Narrative* resists easy critical interpretation. Her cross-dressing especially challenges the hetero/homo binary. In the introduction to her study on the cultural significance of cross-dressing, Marjorie Garber argues, “one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male,’ whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural” (10). In addition to challenging false gender binaries, Charke’s cross-dressing also challenges the false sexual binaries of hetero and homo through the ambiguous representation of her selves. But the act of representation is an important aspect of Charke’s body. Felicity Nussbaum explains that in the mid-eighteenth-century, when the concept of celebrity was not fully formed but the names and bodies of actors and actresses were acquiring their own distinct reputations, the public had “a greater appetite for insider information” (*Rival*

Queens 113). Actor's memoirs, such as Colley Cibber's *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, satiated the public's desire to find out as much as they could about actors' backstage lives. Actresses were fighting the notion that their bodies were for sale because they were paid to publicly perform. Some actress' memoirs took advantage of this struggle and were sensationalized and sexualized; Nussbaum argues that these women coupled their scandalous stories with stories of redemption in order to present an image of contrition to audiences. However, because they are making money by narrating these tales for public consumption, Nussbaum points out that "these women and their texts are both victims and revisionists of received ideas about female character" (*Autobiographical Subject* 190). For these women, the act of writing is subversive; even though the content could be interpreted as conservative confessions, the form of these actresses' narratives and the act of publishing are rebellious. In Charke's case, Nussbaum recognizes the "multiple and serial subjectivities" that Charke invents, and she argues that Charke tries to emphasize the superficiality of her various characters to show her audience that her "inner" character or her "real self" is different from what her actions might imply (*Autobiographical* 192, 195). For Charke and other actresses, "their ability to project the effect of a convincing interiority characterized by an essential generosity" is what rescues them from being definitively branded with the 'whore' label (*Rival* 100). However, as this chapter will demonstrate, Charke's *Narrative* lacks any interiority. While celebrity certainly can involve an illusion of authenticity and/or interiority, celebrities like Charlotte Charke are famous because they *do not* appear genuine. Charke's popularity hinges on mystique and the lack of a "real self."

Obsession with celebrities began with the audiences of the eighteenth-century theater as adoring fans scrambled to see performances from their favorite actors or actresses. In turn, actresses became masters of self-construction. In *Fashioning Celebrity*, Laura Engel writes, “female celebrities had the potential to disrupt, revise, and reinvent traditional models of female identities by calling into question the relationship between authenticity and theatricality” (2). Engel’s book further explores how the eighteenth-century actress was particularly adept at creating an image because she could manipulate what the audience saw in her. Joseph Roach suggests that celebrities construct themselves in a way that would be most appealing to their audiences in order to make themselves both desirable and unattainable; he describes this paradox as “that countenance, the effortless look of *public intimacy*” (*It* 3, my emphasis). Public intimacy implies that the celebrity is both wholly authentic and attainable to his/her audience *and simultaneously* constructed and unattainable. But this is difficult to maneuver; public intimacy requires the celebrity to make herself into a commodity. Leo Braudy argues, “The idea of a commodity self...[expands] when there is a complex economic world in which that possessed self can be variously marketed” (1074). By constructing herself according to her public’s desires, the celebrity’s image becomes a commodity. This commodity is only successful if the celebrity can balance her time in the public eye with a visible desire to be “real” or authentic. In her article critiquing celebrity performances of humanitarianism, Lilie Chouliaraki argues that celebrities must perform an “everyday ordinariness” in order to maintain their beloved status. She writes, “without such strategies of ‘humanization’ that manage to domesticate their extraordinariness, the celebrity would remain in the shadow of inauthenticity” (5-6). Celebrities need to balance

their “It-Effect” with a more normative persona; this enables them to seem “real” and thus garner empathy from their fans who can then think that, after all, ‘celebrities are just like us.’

Charke’s *Narrative* frustrates the reader with its multiplicity; she uses various characters to tell her tale, and we can neither trust nor sympathize with her selves because the narrative voices constantly contradict themselves. Using the bisexual gaze theory can help us sort out the lack of one definitive self. If we identify Charke as a celebrity, then the gaze happens when she interacts with people. But we are looking at this particular gaze process from the point of view of Charke as active object. She invites audiences to interact with her through her fluid, multiple selves. The bisexual gaze enables both viewer and subject to incorporate multiple trajectories of desire. Charke’s *Narrative* is about possibilities—different expressions of sex, gender, and desire. She is able to move within different spheres—genre, professions, gender, sexuality. When she is alive, this fluid movement comes from her body and its interaction with Things. By taking on a piece of clothing as if it were a costume or an object as if it were a prop, Charke’s body becomes a constantly changing canvas of possibilities. There are certainly material consequences to her fluidity; because Things and people come in and out of her life so frequently, there is no lasting success in her lifetime. However, her critical afterlife is extremely successful. She is popular among queer theorists, biographers, scholars of autobiography, feminist critics, and theater studies. Both her celebrity and the playing out of the bisexual gaze allow for this movement. In her lifetime, she was able to enter into the profession and gain popularity as an author because of her connections to Colley Cibber. She was also able to interact with her various types of audiences as she took on

multiple professional roles, gender identities, and sexualities. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries her theoretical celebrity ensures that she is constantly in the critical eye in a number of scholarly spheres. Charke reaches out from the page; we as readers enact our gaze upon her and she encourages our gaze to be a bisexual one—fluidly encompassing multiple trajectories of desire. This is her celebrity appeal in action. Her mystery and her own fluidity spark fluidity in us.

Instead of “public intimacy” or “the illusion of availability” (Roach *It* 3), Charke’s eighteenth-century infamy and twenty-first century critical celebrity is dependent upon her purposeful opaqueness. Our inability to pin her down is the exact reason why she is so popular in critical theory. Thus, from our perspective, it is her *fluidity* that is her greatest asset. Part of the nature of celebrity is that it creates the sense that an icon’s authentic or “real” self is accessible to the public—particularly in memoir form. But an equally important aspect of a different kind of celebrity is an icon’s unattainability. Charke’s life was situated in the midst of the formation of celebrity as we know it today, and her *Narrative* carved out the practice of fluidity that celebrities like Lady Gaga are still utilizing in the twenty-first century.⁹ These celebrities are able to make themselves commodities through a lack of authenticity and stability. Their marketability is rooted in their changeable movement. And it is this movement—or *fluidity*—of objects, of sexuality, and of gender that characterizes Charke’s *Narrative*.

⁹ I am not suggesting that Lady Gaga read Charke’s *Narrative* and became a celebrity because she did exactly what Charke did. I doubt Lady Gaga is even aware of Charlotte Charke’s existence. As my chapter will make clear, I propose that Charke establishes a fluid celebrity in the eighteenth century that we can still identify in the twenty-first century. And, in the same vein, the fluidity of twenty-first century celebrity and eighteenth-century celebrity can improve our understanding of each era when we allow them to inform one another.

In *Fashioning Celebrity*, Laura Engel explains the importance of revisiting actress' memoirs: "it is important to go back and reexamine the specifics of these texts so that we can begin to re-imagine and reassess eighteenth-century actresses' memoirs as a genre that includes a variety of approaches and literary strategies" (16). Her argument for "reexamining" eighteenth-century actress' memoirs holds true for the issues of sexuality and celebrity. Specifically, Charke's *Narrative* can enlighten our ideas about eighteenth-century female sexuality and its interaction with self-fashioning and performed gender subjectivity. In "Transgender Butch," Judith Halberstam explores a "from of gender transitivity" (466) that attempts to consider embodiment, sexuality, and gender as three facets of a person—all are distinct but all work together. Her article recognizes the layers of complex feelings that transgender and transsexual people experience when trying to bring embodiment, sexuality, and gender into an alignment that makes sense to them. We cannot argue that Charlotte Charke self-identified as transgender or bisexual, although, authors such as Marilyn Morris, Jason Cromwell, and Liberty Smith write about transgender possibilities in Charke's *Narrative*. Transgender theory is just one of the many ways we can interpret Charke's *Narrative*. I use the term "fluidity" in this chapter to emphasize Charke's lack of stasis. We may not be able to definitively label her as transgender in the way we see the term in the twenty-first century, but we can certainly consider the fluidity of her gender and sexuality. In "Transgender Butch," Halberstam uses the term transgender to explode gender normative ideologies. Halberstam's arguments about the flexibility of gender and sexuality, though applied in her article to the twenty-first century, can speak to Charke's life: "many, if not most, sexual and gender identities involve some degree of movement (not free-flowing but very scripted)

between bodies, desires, transgressions, and conformities; we do not necessarily shuttle back and forth between sexual roles and practices at will, but we do tend to adjust, accommodate, change, reverse, slide, and move in general between moods and modes of desire” (468). Halberstam paints a picture of a circle of erotic desire in which people can move around fluidly. Rather than swinging back and forth between one gender and another, one sexuality and another, one body and another, she suggests that we have the ability to move around, between, and within these shifting categories. This movement is not necessarily conscious and much of it is socially determined, but some of us move more than others depending on our “moods and modes of desire.” While Halberstam’s ideas could be elaborated further, her main argument is rooted in these intricate processes of sexuality and desire that are consistently moving forward and changing within the body and mind of a human being. So let us look more specifically at how the “degree of movement” that Halberstam describes plays out in Charke’s *Narrative*.

Charke, Material Objects, and Sexual Fluidity

At the age of fourteen, Charlotte Charke spent a considerable amount of time alone with her gun. She brought birds home for dinner, and enjoyed fantasies of herself as “the best Fowler or Marksman in the Universe” (16). Although her mother eventually took the gun away and set Charke to more “gentlewoman[ly]” tasks (16), the young adventurer continued to use objects to negotiate her gender identity and sexuality.

Throughout her *Narrative*, Charke implements both male and female clothing along with a wide variety of Things—including a fiddle, a sword, torches, oils, sugar, pens, and puppets—to delineate and manipulate her social position and her gender performance.

Like a skilled comedienne with innumerable props, Charke uses clothing and material culture to distinguish her fluctuating character. While readers know she is always Charlotte Charke, we see her take on the roles of Physician, Gardner, Stable Boy, Shopkeeper, Puppeteer, Baker, Female Actress, and Male Actor through acquiring the necessary clothing and objects that signify a particular profession and/or gender. In section “IV: Cross-dressing and Wig-donning,” this chapter will examine how the material goods that flit in and out of Charke’s life signify fluidity of gender and female sexuality. The fluctuation and adaptability that Charke’s body represents enables her to obtain and subsequently causes her to lose a wide variety of material goods; this process of moving around, among, and with objects is representative of Charke’s fluid gender and sexuality. To clarify, as Halberstam writes, “Transgender discourse in no way argues that people should just pick up new genders and eliminate old ones or proliferate at will because gendering is available as a self-determining process” (478). In the same way, I am by no means arguing that Charke uses objects to change her gender or sexuality whenever a whim strikes her. Rather, this chapter reads Charke’s *Narrative* as a depiction of a kind of spelunking; she moves through the dark spaces of gender, sexuality, and embodiment with little direction and no certainty. Her “nonmale” and/or “nonfemale genders” are “in circulation” and “under construction” (Halberstam 478). Subsequently, this chapter describes Charke’s body as “fluid” because she resides in the liminal spaces of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Her existence and movement within these gray areas become slightly more tangible when they are anchored to objects. Further, this chapter will argue for the existence of productive ambiguity within Charke’s *Narrative*. Productive ambiguity is generally used in the fields of mathematics, science, and business

to refer to a way of embracing ambiguous data in order to arrive at a tangible conclusion.¹⁰ I propose that embracing Charke as an ambiguous or fluid body will enable us to more fully understand the importance of erotic desires that are “in circulation” and “under construction” in the continuum of sexualities.

As I proposed in this project’s introduction, the bisexual gaze involves active participation from both viewer and object. The way the bisexual gaze plays out between Charke and her contemporaries will become clearer as we delve into her *Narrative*. But as a celebrity of critical fields and scholarship, Charke becomes an object of our theoretical gaze. I classify this gaze as bisexual because Charke’s *Narrative* and life invite multiple interpretations of her body. As an author, she presents a text with numerous possibilities and invites numerous desires. As a reader, we can move with Charke in different trajectories of gender, sex, and desire. Charke’s *Narrative* provides us with an entry point into the fluidity and complexity of the bisexual gaze—a concept that will be carried out throughout this and the next two chapters. The bisexual gaze, as we will see, emerges strongly in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and is problematized in Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft*, but it begins here with Charlotte Charke.

II. Charlotte’s Celebrity Beginnings

Born in 1713, Charlotte was Colley and Katherine Cibber’s youngest daughter. Katherine, at 45-years-old, must have thought she was done with child-bearing, and though Colley was worried about his wife both she and Charlotte were healthy after the birth. She was born at a time when Cibber’s career was successful and the family was

¹⁰ For more on the scientific history and theory of productive ambiguity, see Doug Belshaw and Steve Higgins’ “Digital Literacy, Digital Natives, and the Continuum of Ambiguity.”

relatively wealthy. We might compare her to Suri Cruise or North West;¹¹ she was the child of two successful actors and her father was famous in social, cultural, and political spheres. Charlotte was an eighteenth-century version of a celebrity baby. Helene Koon suggests that Cibber “spoiled her from the beginning” (70), and Kathryn Shevelow notes that Charlotte’s siblings—particularly Catherine, who was 17 years older than Charlotte—were likely resentful that she did not have to endure the same struggles that they did when their family was relatively young and the Cibbers were financially struggling (47-48). In addition, Charke always behaved counter to her siblings through her play-acting, gender bending, and cross-dressing. Whatever the reasons, a precarious family dynamic was certainly present amongst the Cibbers for all of Charlotte’s life.

Charlotte grew up with her family in London; while Cibber added to his infamy at Drury Lane, Charlotte soaked in the urban environment which, as Shevelow notes, likely including frequent sightings of drunks and prostitutes as well as the Prince and Princess of Wales (65). She attended Mrs. Draper’s school in Park Street where she obtained a traditionally masculine education. She learned Latin and geography alongside singing, dancing, reading, and writing. Colley likely allowed his daughter the freedom of education in part because she was his apparently spoiled youngest child and in part because he was grooming her for the stage (Shevelow 69). She began acting professionally at the age of seventeen.¹² At nineteen, she was becoming famous for both

¹¹ Suri Cruise (born 2006) is the daughter of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, two internationally famous actors. North West (born 2013) is the daughter of Kim Kardashian, a popular reality television star, and Kanye West, an international hip-hop and R&B artist. Both children were covered extensively by the American media.

¹² Her first recorded appearance on stage took place on Wednesday, April 8, 1730 in Act I, scene ii of *The Provok’d Wife* (Shevelow 106).

her breeches parts—roles in which she played a female character who cross-dressed within the play—and her travesty parts—roles in which she played a male character.

As Charlotte's fame increased, Cibber's career continued to sky-rocket. In addition to being a celebrated (and highly criticized) actor, theater manager, and playwright, he was named Poet Laureate in 1730. He also continued to cultivate his close friendship with the infamous Prime Minister, Robert Walpole (1676-1745). While his increasingly powerful position in London society and politics brought material comfort to him and his family, Cibber was a frequent target of political satirists including Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and Henry Fielding (1707-1754). Cibber's feud with Fielding is a well-known piece of theater history. Cibber was already a manager at Drury Lane when Fielding entered London's theater scene as a young author trying to make a name for himself as a playwright. Cibber accepted Fielding's first play but rejected his second; to avenge this rejection, Fielding wrote *The Author's Farce* (1730) in which he mocks Cibber through the character, Marplot (Koon 123). Charlotte, seemingly unable and certainly unwilling to keep out of trouble, made the Cibber-Fielding feud worse. Even after Charlotte married Richard Charke against Cibber's better judgement, Colley advocated for Charlotte and she became a success at Drury Lane. But she and her father constantly argued. Koon claims that once Charlotte gained a small amount of fame, she became "as demanding as a veteran diva" and was impossible to work with (139). Charlotte, now Mrs. Charke, left Drury Lane and joined Fielding's Grand Mogul's Company in 1736 (Koon 141). In 1737, she performed in Fielding's *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*—a "knife-edged satire of Walpole" and Cibber (Koon 143). Cibber had offered Charke financial help a few times previously, and he surely felt

betrayed and hurt when Charke began to work for his enemy. She both participated in and made a profit from publicly teasing her father.

In 1737, just a month after Fielding's *Historical Register*, Walpole was successful in passing the Licensing Act. Many in the theater community blamed Cibber, as well, claiming that he must have been equally instrumental in passing the Act because he was close with Walpole (Koon 144). As a direct result of the Licensing Act, the Haymarket Theater had to shut down and Charke was out of a job. There is no record of Charke and her father ever speaking again. It was into this silence that Charke tried to reach out and plead for Cibber's forgiveness through her 1755 *Narrative*. Unsurprisingly, Cibber did not respond in kind and, knowing the history, it is difficult to be certain of Charke's sincerity. Nonetheless, she attempts to use her family's fame to promote her memoir.

Charke's non-linear, somewhat manic autobiography first appeared on March 1, 1755 as a short introduction to the first installment of her novel, *The History of Henry Dumont*. The piece about herself was so popular among readers that Charke expanded her narrative and published it in eight parts. These comprised most of Charke's life up to 1755—particularly the years after her child was born and she roamed around the English countryside trying her hand at whatever would get her food and shelter. According to Kathryn Shevelow, author of the brilliantly researched, comprehensive Charke biography, *Charlotte*, "the public was always hungry for sensational experiences, and they loved reading 'true stories.' Readers would flock to buy Charlotte's own account of her extraordinary, entertaining adventures" (348). Charke's *Narrative* was one of the first secular autobiographies written by a woman and it was the "first English autobiography

written by an actress” (Shevelow 353).¹³ Charke begins the Narrative with a dedication of the work from “the author to herself” (5) in which she establishes this autobiography as an attempt at self-acceptance: “If, by your Approbation, the World may be perswaded into a tolerable Opinon of my Labours, I shall, for the Novelty-sake, venture for once to call you, FRIEND; a Name, I own, I never as yet have known you by” (6). Charke’s expressed desire to come to terms with herself has the immediate indication of purposeful performance. She holds her own self-acceptance hostage against the ransom of the world’s “tolerable Opinion of [her] Labours.” If she is able to cultivate the good public opinion that this autobiography is meant to foster, only then will she be able to call herself “friend.” If popularity is any gauge, then Charke certainly provoked a great deal of public opinion. After the installments of her narrative were printed, they were immediately collected and reprinted in book-form. There was a second printing that year and her narrative was reissued four years later. In addition, condensed versions of her narrative appeared in both *The Gentleman’s Magazine* and *The Magazine of Magazines* (Shevelow 343-4).

III. Charlotte Charke’s Afterlives: History of Critical Reception

In the last thirty years, Charke has become an icon in gender studies and queer theory. As we continue to consider Charke through the lens of celebrity studies, we can cast these numerous critical representations of her as her afterlives. Charke’s life invites

¹³ Because the genre itself was so new, writing a narrative about oneself was considered vain and even risqué. Shevelow explains, “Publishing one’s personal history without a religious justification...or a political one...was a new and controversial idea in eighteenth-century England. The term “autobiography” had not even been coined yet. Many felt that there was something shameful about exposing one’s life in print for its own sake....For a woman to do such a thing was even more provocatively immodest: it was public exposure more disreputable than acting, a kind of literary striptease that might make her more notorious” (348-9).

scholarship largely because her narrative is complex and puzzling—particularly when critics read her narrative through the lens of queer theory and sexuality studies. In her afterward to the seminal collection of essays, *Introducing Charlotte Charke*, Felicity Nussbaum writes, “Charke’s subjectivity is less a monolith, a reified and knowable self, than a knotty intertwining of identities that yield multiple and often contradictory material effects that are as varied and heterodox as the roles she performed in public and private” (228). In contemporary sexuality studies, critics struggle with the “knotty intertwining of identities” of Charke’s narrative as they attempt to place her somewhere between “hetero” and “homo”; often, they simply use the term “queer” or they argue that Charke embodies unnamed new categories of gender and sexuality because theoretical scholarship lacks the language to explain her sexual subject position. In “Charlotte Charke and the Liminality of Bi-Genderings: A Study of Her Canonical Works,” Polly S. Fields argues that Charke “creates a new gender system, through the adoption of a series of dualities” in the characters of her work (225). Fields claims that through her drama, fiction, and autobiography Charke creates “another Eden” in which Adam (or masculinity) and Eve (or femininity) reside in one body (227); Charke’s intention is to extract herself from the oppressive rules of a heteronormative matrix. While Fields’ analysis of the variety of Charke’s gender performances produces fascinating insights, the article’s conclusion is misguided. True, Charke is clearly attempting to break away from the heteronormative social regulations of gender (that man must be masculine and woman must be feminine); however, by arguing that Charke takes both genders into her own body through the adoption of a series of “dualities,” Fields unintentionally iterates the discourse of a false gender binary. The word duality, when applied to a gender system,

implies that there are only two gendered subject positions that Charke can embody. While Charke's ability to oscillate between genders contributes to a disruption of the heteronormative matrix, arguing that Charke occupies only two gendered subject positions ultimately places her back in the tension between the two polarities. The result of this argument is an iteration of discourse that reinforces a binarized view of gender.

What complicates the critical interpretations of Charke's interaction with gender is the textual representation of her sexuality. In addition to cross-dressing, she takes on a female companion who we only know by the name of Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Brown was a fellow actress, and biographers speculate that they likely met at some point in London between 1733 and 1745. In her autobiography, Charke never reveals Mrs. Brown's real name and we know very little about her apart from what Charlotte tells us. Around 1744, Charke joined Mr. Linnet's country strolling troupe and this is where she first seems to travel under the name Charles Brown. Eventually, Charke and her companion lived under the names of Mr. and Mrs. Brown. We can conclude from Charke's autobiography that Mr. and Mrs. Brown were simply taken as a married couple by nearly everyone they met. Shevelow describes Mrs. Brown as Charke's "loving, loyal companion" (337). Lisa Moore suggests that "Charke constructs as the secret of the text an all-female space in which, paradoxically, gender loses its salience, because it no longer marks out one subjects from another. In a context in which differences of gender recede in importance, difference of sexuality among women, rather than between men and women, can emerge" (94). For Moore, gender and sexuality are separated in Charke's *Narrative*. This pull between gender and sexuality has characterized most of Charke's critical afterlives.

The theoretical appropriation of Charke's *Narrative* emphasizes the chameleon nature of its critical significance. In the studies of her autobiography, Charke has become a theory icon for the recovery movement in the late 1980s and early to mid 1990s, for gender performance in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and currently for cross-dressing and trans studies in the 2010s. Scholars have found that Charke's life—as it is represented in her *Narrative*—can reasonably be read through a variety of critical lenses, including gender studies, queer studies, performativity and performance studies, and theater studies. We can link most critical approaches through their examination of Charke's cross-dressing. However, because she never gives a definitive reason for that cross-dressing, scholars use clues of her *Narrative* to piece together a hypothesis for Charke's "passionate Fondness for a Perriwig" (Charke 10). The interpretations of her behavior range from identifying it as a conscious attempt to escape the social restrictions of a male-dominated system to speculating that it may be an unconscious outgrowth of an inherent gender identity crisis—an experience we would now call transgender. Her *Narrative's* ability to fit fairly well into a variety of critical interpretations is indicative of its flexibility and fluidity. Like its author and subject, the autobiography can slip into and out of critical theories like familiar costumes.

Discussion of Charke as a critical subject began just forty years after the *Narrative's* publication with Samuel Whyte's "Anecdote of Mrs. Charke." Published in the *Monthly Mirror* in June of 1796, Whyte's piece painted a picture of the last few years of Charke's life—the years that were not depicted in her *Narrative* (which was published just five years before she died). Sue Churchill points out that "Whyte's account of the end of Charke's life profoundly influenced subsequent readings of her autobiography,

imposing a tragic ending on her *Narrative*,” which Churchill, along with other critics, argue is actually more comic than tragic (73). At the very least, most critics, including Sidonie Smith, Kristina Straub, and Cheryl Wanko, believe that Charke is consciously embracing multiplicity and ambiguity. Or, more simply, Charke is both an active agent in her *Narrative* and a victim of poverty, as Samuel Whyte suggests. In addition, Whyte’s representation of Charke was an indication of how he thought of Charke: as a “menace to society. Whyte specifically parodies Charke’s domesticity, and domesticity,” Churchill maintains, “is precisely where Charke and her *Narrative* pose the greatest threat...[her] fatal flaws of negligence and improvidence stand in particular opposition to the domestic ideal so powerful at the time of Whyte’s writing” (76). Churchill’s perception of Whyte’s hypermasculine, matrophobic, sexist version of Charke’s life and *Narrative* leads her to look specifically at the way Charke has been represented as a “pathetic figure” (74) in both biographies about her and in discussions of her *Narrative*. Churchill traces representations of Charke as a pathetic figure in multiple sources over the last two hundred or so years. The theoretical basis of her argument is now familiar to eighteenth century scholars—that we often read eighteenth-century texts through the lens of nineteenth-century ideas about gender and sex.

Essentially, Churchill intends to “re-vision’ Charke’s text, freeing it from the distortions of nineteenth-century narratives and ideology” (77). Churchill is not the first scholar to recast Charke’s narrative; her essay was published in 1997 and it followed three groundbreaking pieces on Charke: Sidonie Smith’s “*A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke: The Transgressive Daughter and the Masquerade of Self-Representation*” from *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* (1987), Erin Mackie’s

“Desperate Measures: The Narratives of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke” (1991), and Kristina Straub’s “The Guilty Pleasures of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing and the Autobiography of Charlotte Charke” from *Sexual Suspects* (1992). Churchill’s article marks the expansion of in-depth, diverse Charke studies. By declaring a desire to “re-vision” the text, Churchill implies that this is a text worth a lot more critical attention and that this critical attention should include experimenting with interpretations of Charke’s life—an implication that would not be valid without the recovery efforts of Smith, Mackie, and Straub. In the late 1980’s and 1990’s, Charke first became a figure of importance to eighteenth-century gender and sexuality studies, and she was quickly identified as a complex author and character that could become the darling of numerous branches of eighteenth-century queer studies.

Sidonie Smith is one of the only critics to ask questions of Charke’s *Narrative* as an autobiography. Many scholars focus either on her gender and genre bending in the text¹⁴ or they examine one of Charke’s other works that has received less critical attention.¹⁵ But in her reading, Smith discovers that Charke practices a kind of double blind experiment on the reader. She represents herself as both “sentimental penitent and female rogue” (85), and when a reader attempts to peel back the mask of one she will only find the other; the audience never knows which is the essential Charke. Thus, the purpose of the autobiography is performance: “In the very writing...Charke engages in a carnivalesque drama of impersonation, linking the process of writing autobiography with

¹⁴ See, for example, Cheryl Wanko’s chapter “The Eighteenth-Century Actress and the Construction of Gender” from 2003 or Kirsten Pullen’s chapter “Memoir and Masquerade: Charlotte Charke, Margaret Leeson and Eighteenth-Century Performances of Self” from 2005.

¹⁵ For example, Polly S. Fields’ “Charlotte Charke and the Limanlity of Bi-Genderings: A Study of Her Canonical Works” from 1999 or, more recently, Joel Schechter’s “Charlotte Charke’s *Tit for Tat*; or, *Comedy and Tragedy at War*: A Lost Play Recovered” from 2013.

the dynamics of selfhood” (94). While acknowledging what Charke is trying to do, Smith argues that these endless layers of performance prevent Charke from a self-understanding and she ultimately “becomes only endless words strung together” (102). While Smith’s discussion of Charke’s self-representation is still the authority on Charke and the autobiographical genre, Danielle Gissinger’s “‘The Oddity of My Appearance Soon Assembled a Croud’: The Performative Bodies of Cindy Sherman and Charlotte Charke” provides a fascinating “re-vision” of Charke alongside twentieth and twenty-first century performance artist, Cindy Sherman. Gissinger suggests that the conscious performance of re-making the self allows both women to “challenge social norms” (246) and force the reader/viewer/critic to reevaluate his/her concept of identity and the self. Other scholars—including Christine Cloud, Laura Engel, Marilyn Morris, and Kirsten Pullen—recognize, as Gissinger does, that Charke is “perpetually engaged in a performance, and as a result, her autobiography is marked by a sense of ambiguity” (247). Gissinger’s 2009 article turns Smith’s exploration of the autobiography as self-examination outward toward the audience; for Gissinger, the autobiographical performances of Charke and Sherman cause their audiences to engage in that same self-examination by challenging normative identity politics.

Literary critics have done extensive work on reading Charke as a lesbian and queer historical figure, but scholars who discuss her sexuality tend to focus on identifying her as lesbian or not lesbian rather than consider how her sexuality might be fluid. Baruth’s edited collection, *Introducing Charlotte Charke: Actress, Author, Enigma*, includes reprints of Smith and Straub’s book chapters in addition to several new essays on Charke and her influence over eighteenth-century culture, and the essays serve as

models for using contemporary queer theory and performance theory to read eighteenth-century literature. Yet Baruth's collection does not address the question of bisexuality, and some of the essays struggle with reading Charke's performance of multiple genders and sexualities without conflating gender and sex. To avoid the difficulty of interpreting Charke's ambiguously performed gender subject positions, most scholars focus solely on Charke's masculinity. When examining the Mr. and Mrs. Brown relationship, Philip Baruth writes, "Charke's presentation of the relationship can suggest the outlines of a marriage, even one patterned on time-honored heterosexual cliché, but those outlines must then be effectively blurred" (Baruth 47). Baruth suggests that Charke models the discussion of her relationship with Mrs. Brown in her narrative after heteronormative frameworks. But he also adds that his own assertion is not definitive. Sidonie Smith looks at Charke's masculinity from a slightly different angle—from the perspective of a woman attempting to subvert a heteronormative power structure. Smith argues, "On the psychological level, her cross-dressing speaks to female desire for authority, adventure, power, and mobility, the accouterments of male selfhood...Male impersonation promises empowerment" (94). Like Baruth, Smith's argument comes from a separation of male and female or masculine and feminine power, and they both examine the masculine element of her performance—as husband, as cross-dresser.

In a 2009 article published in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* entitled "The Theatrics of Self-Sentiment in a *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*," Heather Lobban-Viravong moves away from gender studies and argues that because she is unable to garner sympathy from the people around her, Charke uses her *Narrative* as a stage in order to seek sympathy from herself. She becomes "both actor and spectator" and

“achieves a level of inwardness that counters standard readings of her personal history” (195). Lobban-Viravong’s approach is based on theories of the autobiography and sympathy,¹⁶ and she relies heavily on the connection between the narrative and the theater in her analyses of different scenes. Ultimately, the argument that Charke’s *Narrative* in some ways “validates postmodernist claims about the fragmented nature of the self and the impossibility of writing a self that is unified and whole” and that “her ‘self-division’ exposes the alienation that accompanies this condition” (207) is similar to Smith’s original premise that Charke’s writing does not help her come to any firm conclusions about herself. However, where Smith sees the text as a failure to challenge patriarchy, Lobban-Viravong—similar to Gissinger—recognizes the value in Charke’s lack of clear conclusions about her identity.

Erin Mackie’s provocative article argues against leading eighteenth-century feminist critics, Felicity Nussbaum and Sidonie Smith and their articles on Charke’s *Narrative* from 1988 and 1987, respectively.¹⁷ Mackie juxtaposes Charke’s fiction alongside her *Narrative* in order to disprove the label that Nussbaum and Smith create for Charke: a failed feminist. Mackie argues that Charke is actually loyal to patriarchal system: “Charke seeks not to liberate herself from the limitations of the patriarchy but to

¹⁶ Lobban-Viravong uses Adam Smith’s definition of sympathy in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and “his use of the language of theater to contemplate sympathy. In his work, Smith theorizes about the role sympathy plays in social relationships, describing the ‘change of situation’ upon which sympathy depends as one between sufferer and spectator. He writes: ‘In all such cases, that there may be some correspondence of sentiments between the spectator and the person principally concerned, the spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded’ (21). By describing the figure who observes the sufferer as ‘spectator,’ Smith acknowledges the theatrical nature of sympathetic engagement with another. It isn’t enough for the spectator to observe the sufferer, but he or she must also *play* the sufferer by placing ‘himself in the situation of the other.’”

¹⁷ Nussbaum’s *The Autobiographical Subject* and Smith’s “A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke: The Transgressive Daughter and the Masquerade of Self-Representation.”

reinscribe the patriarchy in a way that suits her” (844) and “Charke does not simply try to duplicate patriarchy with her travesties, but to amend it. For Charke, trespass and travesty are instruments not for subversion but for representations and reform” (862). Mackie for the most part uses generalizations to tie her theories about Charke together, and she does not clarify the changes Charke intends to make to the patriarchal structure apart from asserting that in her fiction, Charke creates a patriarchy which “admits her, both as Charlotte and Charles, and...as patriarch himself” (862). Mackie implies that Charke would like to be accepted as a patriarchal (male) figure while simultaneously retaining her Charlotte (female) identity. Though Mackie correctly refutes the “failed feminist” label, she places another label on Charke: “constructor of patriarchal structures.”

Some scholars have examined Charke’s *Narrative* in the context of her celebrity family, which is a reoccurring theme in her memoirs as she inserts commentary when she looks back on domestic incidents. Within the first few pages, Charke clearly indicates her intention to her readers: “I shall, with Pride and unutterable Transport, throw myself at [my father’s] Feet, to implore the only Benefit I desire or expect, his BLESSING, and his PARDON” (8). However, the rest of her *Narrative* paints a picture in which she is more of a victim than a prodigal child, and Cibber ultimately appears rather black-hearted and unforgiving. This is just one example of the contradictory nature of Charke’s autobiography. She claims that she wants to be reconciled with her father, but she proceeds to destroy any chance at reconciliation by continuing to mock him throughout her *Narrative*. In an extended look at the connections between Charke’s relationship with her father and how her autobiography addresses gender roles, Joseph Chancey argues that she is not being intentionally subversive and that of all her transgressive identities, the

only consistent one is her desire to take on her father's identity. As opposed to a cross-dresser who uses her male character to enhance or emphasize her female one, Chancey proposes that Charke loses herself in her masculine identity (220). Chancey's article does not use the word "transgender" but circles the idea by arguing that Charke's cross-dressing is more of an "impulse" than a "strategy" (202) and suggesting that she is coping with something "unspeakable" (223). His ideas gesture toward the work of critics such as Marilyn Morris who, in 2009, argued that Charke is able to depict "the wider possibilities of erotic desire" because they are "unhampered by the freight of sexual orientation" (73).

Current Charke studies are concerned with allowing for a more liberal consideration of her erotic life without requiring proof of a specific identity. Morris stays away from identity labels but allows Charke to have a sexuality that is Other (that does not adhere to the boundaries of heteronormative sexuality). She recognizes that Charke's writing is a means of self-fashioning; and, like nearly every other critic that examines this text, she acknowledges the lack of a 'true' or 'real' self in the autobiography. However, Morris uniquely uses Charke to more deeply explore how "the performance of queer identities differed before the existence of gay and lesbian cultures. Their self-representation stressed their individuality and produced a *protective ambiguity* rather than an association with a group identity" (91, my emphasis). This chapter follows Marilyn Morris and Kristina Straub in a scholarly vein that allows readers to embrace Charke as a fluid critical figure. If we can accept that her textual performance does not provide definitive conclusions about her identity, we can approach her *Narrative* with a more post-modern perspective on the erotic desire present within the text. This chapter contributes to a new afterlife of Charke that embraces "the wider possibilities of erotic

desire” through a close examination of the objects that Charke interacts with in her autobiography. Although many critics have identified important objects in her life (such as her father’s periwig, her male clothes, and her puppets), few have drawn connections between Charke’s sexuality and the Things she owns, handles, and writes about. It is the examination of the objects in Charke’s life that further reveals the fluidity of her self-representation and her text. And it is this incorporation of material culture into Charke’s critical afterlives that enable us to “re-vision” Charke in this twenty-first century critical moment.

IV. Cross-dressing and Wig-donning

Charke punctuates the first few pages of her narrative with what she considers the unfortunate circumstances of her birth to Colley and Katherine Cibber—she was the youngest child and she describes herself in relation to her siblings as “an unexpected [and] unwelcome Guest into the [F]amily...an impertinent Intruder” (9). For most of her life, Charlotte was at odds with her father and the rest of her family. In addition to the description of her pretending to be her father as a child, Charke’s narrative proceeds to record her various adventures—both personal and theatrical/public—in a non-linear fashion. Her narrative reads more like a long, conversational monologue than a carefully crafted prose piece. She does end with a (somewhat) chronological summary of all the events her narrative records; as she reflects on her life, she concludes, “I have, through the whole Course of my Life, acted in Contradiction to all Points of Regularity” (139). This is truly the anthem of Charke’s narrative. Whether or not she actually “act[ed] in contradiction to all points of regularity,” her narrative certainly presents her as such.

Most critics point to Charke's cross-dressing as this contradiction to regularity that she describes; scholars have speculated on Charke's motivation for going about in men's clothes: perhaps it was more convenient to not have to carry a change of petticoats to and from her home but to just walk about in costume; perhaps it was a matter of economics (maybe she could not afford multiple sets of both petticoats and breeches); or perhaps she wanted to take advantage of both the social liberty and the freedom of movement that male clothing allowed. Whatever the case, the important fact to note is that she continued to dress in breeches regularly both on and off stage until 1753, just a few years before her death in 1760.

Much of the research on Charke uses cross-dressing as the entry point into an examination of her life. Although, being an eighteenth-century woman who dresses as a man is by no means unique. Susannah Centlivre, Sally Paul, Mary Hamilton (the inspiration for Fielding's *The Female Husband* [1746]), and Hannah Snell of *The Female Soldier* (1750) all dressed and lived for a time as men (Nussbaum *Autobiographical Subject* 198). But Charke's particular brand of cross-dressing is distinctive because her male alter ego is not the only role she performs. Her *Narrative* reveals that she is not just a woman who dresses as a man for a particular reason, but she is a person embodying a multiplicity of selves. In fact, she refuses to tell her readers why she cross-dresses. She teases the reader with indications that she does have a reason (or multiple reasons) for cross-dressing, but she only goes so far as to say that she *cannot* reveal the reason to us: "My being in Breeches was alleged to me as a very great Error, but the original Motive proceeded from a particular Cause; and I rather choose to undergo the worst Imputation that can be laid on me on that Account, than unravel the Secret, which is an Appendix to

the one I am bound, as I before hinted, by all the Vows of Truth and Honor everlastingly to conceal” (73). Also: “My going into Men’s Cloaths, in which I continued many Years; the Reason of which I beg to be excused, as it concerns no Mortal *now living*, but myself” (141). She suggests that cross-dressing served a specific purpose in her life, but that purpose is an extremely delicate secret that, if revealed, might unearth someone else’s secret *and* that it is no concern of ours. Her last mention of it (“as it concerns no Mortal...but myself”) reads a little like “it’s none of your business.” Even though she’s opened up her entire life to an audience through her *Narrative*, she clearly controls what she discloses about her life. Like the actresses of Engel’s *Fashioning Celebrity*, Charke is careful about how she builds her image.

Most critics recognize Charke’s self-awareness; establishing her conscious participation in crafting her own image identifies her as an agent in selecting the roles she plays. Cheryl Wanko argues that Charke’s *Narrative* is “a complex interplay between roles imposed and roles assumed, contributing to a fragmented gender performance.” Wanko explains that Charke writes from the point of view of an actress standing on stage: “The actress assumed the qualities that fit the dramatic role her audience expects...the actress herself is always aware that she is creating an illusion of self” (87). As readers, we are hyper aware of the way Charke presents her various selves. This representation of multiple selves has prompted scholars, like Christine Cloud, to think about Charke as a transvestite. In “The Chameleon, Cross-Dressed Autobiography of Charlotte Charke (1713-1760),” Cloud suggests,

The transvestite autobiography introduces variable multiple selves which are oftentimes in opposition to one another. These selves refuse the

regulation of their body through their clothing, thus they undermine the universal 'I's' attempt to define itself as a spiritual essence which is in opposition to an 'Other' which has been essentialized as body. They then base their autobiographical portrait of themselves on their refusal to allow society to sign them a particular gender and then order them to act in complete correspondence with the sex-based role that they have been assigned to play for their entire lives. (870)

Cloud goes on to use Charke's *Narrative* as a case study in her broader theories about transvestite autobiographies. Charke's text certainly does fit Cloud's definition of a transvestite autobiography. The cross-dressing may not be a central focus in the text's narration, but Charke clearly moves within different 'selves' without allowing society to dictate what those selves should look like.

Charke frames her *Narrative* with a seemingly authentic piety. But the story she tells comprises scenes of drag, performance, adventure, and scandal. Thus, instead of being a plea for forgiveness, her autobiography becomes another means of an ambiguous gender performance and self-construction. Kristina Straub writes, "Refusing to resolve the sexual ambiguities of her textual performance by giving her audience either a heterosexually defined romantic heroine or a 'monstrous' female human, Charke fails to participate in what was becoming the dominant construction of feminine sexuality: the woman as oppositional, defining other to male sexuality" (135). Charke does not commit to a specific gender role and that lack of commitment highlights the false binary of man vs. woman. Straub also indicates that Charke is able to decide to assume an independent role in society. She constructs her own identity through "the sexual ambiguities of her

textual performance” and she does not allow that identity to be easily labeled (as woman, monstrous figure, sexual suspect, queer body). Her autobiography is a performance and we might even argue that it is a feminist text or a queer text. It is a marvelous record of performative displays that challenges gender normativity and captures a body constantly in flux.

The anxiety Charke expresses over “the following History [being] the Product of a Female Pen” (7) at the beginning of her narrative reveals both her knowledge of and anxiety over an ambiguous gender performance. She “tremble[s] for the terrible Hazard it must run in venturing into the World” and worries that the public will form negative opinions of her *Narrative* without actually reading it (7). To have a female pen is to have a phallic symbol with a feminine descriptor; Charke is grappling with a physical trait of one gender and a signifier of another. We already know that Charke sees herself as an oddity, an outsider, and a stranger. Perhaps the key to understanding Charke is hidden in this encompassing of multiple genders—particularly through phallic symbols. For example, she uses a broom to help her get the necessary clothing when she first dresses as her father:

By the Help of a long Broom, I took down a Waistcoat of my Brother’s,
and an enormous bushy Tie-wig of my Father’s, which entirely enclosed
my Head and Body, with the Knots of the Ties thumping my little Heels as
I march’d along, with slow and solemn Pace. The Covert of Hair in which
I was conceal’d, with the Weight of a monstrous Belt and large Silver-
hilted Sword, that I could scarce drag along, was a vast Impediment in my
Procession. (10)

This scene of preparation before she performs as her father is full of conflicting gender signifiers. The long broom as a phallic signifier serves Charke as a means of obtaining the masculine clothing. The large sword drags along the ground because it does not fit her small female body. However, it is her father's wig that interests me. Scholars agree that the wig Charke describes herself wearing is similar to the "most famously enlarged periwig of the Augustan age" that Cibber wore as part of his character, Sir Novelty Fashion (Powell and Roach 79). This wig took on a life of its own in tandem to Cibber's celebrity; it was so large that it "entered the stage on its own sedan chair, borne by two lackeys, following in Sir Novelty's train, like plunder in Triumph" (Powell and Roach 80). The magnificence of this wig is indisputable; however, scholars do differ in their interpretations of this episode's significance, depending on their view of Charke herself. For scholars who focus on Charke's performative life, the wig and attention she gets for it represents the "heady allure of celebrity, the gratification of attracting an audience and making them laugh" (Shevelow 53). Joseph Chancey, who identifies Charke as a prodigal son figure, argues that Charke's "early cross-dressing episode are marked by...[a] deep ambivalence toward her father" and that the way the wig entirely engulfs her is a representation of how Charke "hides in her father's identity. She is creating an illusion she herself must ultimately believe in" (221). But Kristina Straub points out that "by Charke's time, the full-bottomed periwig was considered old-fashioned, and actors who continued to wear them were considered ridiculous. Charke's 'fondness' for a periwig reads in this context more like a parodic comment on her father's earlier professional pose as Lord Foppington than like a serious desire to emulate her father" (140). Straub further argues that the parodic nature of little Charlotte's cross-dressing highlights the

ambiguity of sex and the constructed nature of gender: through “mimicry,” Charke “marks that roles *as a role*, gestures toward the artificiality—and tenuousness—of the masculinity that she, in turn, puts on” (140). By describing the process of putting on the wig, Charke invites her readers to see the seams of her performance. She shows us how she can slip into and out of a role through the use of objects. In this way, she reveals her fluidity and we are fascinated by these moments of flux.

We could argue that the wig, like the muff, is a signifier of female genitalia—it is a large, furry object that becomes an important piece of a women’s attractiveness and value; yet the wig that literally engulfs her as a child belongs to her father. The image recalls the 1787 J.W. Fores print entitled “The Muff” in which a woman is holding a muff so large that the viewer can only see her head and feet. Engel argues, “the depiction of the muff [in the print] acquire[s] an animalistic, predatory, and ferocious life of its own. The idea of the muff consuming the female body so that the only thing left is the furry object itself suggests an attack on the consuming female subject and anxieties about her potential to spin out of control” (*Austen, Actresses and Accessories* Introduction). If the wig, like the muff, symbolizes female sexuality then Engel’s argument about Fores’ “The Muff” print could also apply to the image Charke paints of herself being obscured by her father’s giant wig. The difference is that Charke is inside the wig where the woman in Fores’ print is holding the muff. Charke is arguably being consumed by a sexual symbol that is at once male and female. While Fores’ muff, as Engel argues, gestures toward a female’s potential to consume, the wig that Charke wears gestures toward the ridiculousness of the feminized man, Sir Novelty Fashion. And since, as Straub notes, the full-bottomed periwig was by this time considered out-of-style, its presence brings to

mind the aging actor that once wore it in his days of glory. Subsequently, it might symbolize Cibber's impotence and even his own inability to control both his decaying body and the fruit of that body—the daughter that flaunts her rebelliousness in print. In this sense, the giant wig, when worn by Charke and described in her *Narrative*, also evokes a sense of female power and agency that mocks patriarchy even as it appropriates symbols of its success.

The wig is both Cibber's prop and Charke's prop; while he uses the wig to play a fop, Charke uses the wig to play her father. She appears to conflate the effeminate behaviors with her father and she also subconsciously understands that performance presents opportunities for trying on different "hats" (or wigs). I am not suggesting that Charke is merely experimenting with masculinity; there is a great deal of evidence to support reading her as transgender. But Charke does use the wig to signify those performative transitions. As Margaret K. Powell and Joseph Roach explain in their article "Big Hair," it is important to remember, "hair is a performance, one that happens at the boundary of self-expression and social identity, of creativity and conformity, and of production and consumption. Hair lends itself particularly well to self-fashioning performance because it is liminal, on the threshold, 'betwixt and between'" (83). Hair is ambiguous, and its performance is also ambiguous. Powell and Roach point out that both men and women were interested in big hair—"specialized wigs" delineated "professional and social identities" for men while women used hair styles as "job descriptions, marking fashionable ladies as the special bearers and makers of waste" (96). Wigs and hair play key roles in the image of a celebrity and her performance. Hair, according to Roach, "can exert a magical power even greater than clothes and accessories," because—particularly

in the case of wigs—it is both a part of the body and can survive the body’s death (*It* 117). Powell and Roach also argue that Cibber’s Foppington wig confirms the trend of big hair across the sexes when Charke writes about it in her autobiography (96). The wig, then, is as Straub suggests, a signifier of ambiguity. The way Charke easily accesses the wig and then is forced to relinquish it pushes this ambiguity to further signify fluidity. The wig slips in and out of Charke’s life—it is significant when critics read her as either a transvestite or transgender figure but in the story of the *Narrative* it is only a small incident, a part of a whole.

Charke’s wig emerges again when, in an often-studied incident, Charke runs out into the street carrying an ill Kitty and the crowd mistakes her for a young father because she is wearing men’s clothing. Kathryn Shevelow identifies the peculiarity of the scene’s description: “Instead of securing help from the crowd, Charlotte enacted a scene of maternal anguish worthy of Agnes or Andromache—with one difference: her men’s clothes” (Shevelow 286). These men’s clothes shown in tandem with her maternity brings together the two polarities of the false gender binary and engages with a variety of gender possibilities.

Charke’s daughter Catherine, or Kitty, was born in 1731. After the 1737 Licensing Act took effect, Charke struggled to find work and feed and clothe her daughter. Her narrative does not give an exact date, though we can imagine that this episode with Kitty is post-1737 since she is desperate for money.¹⁸ What happens, according to her autobiography, is this: Charke leaves her home to pawn some clothing and returns to find her daughter on the floor in “strong Convulsion Fits” (51). She then picks up Kitty, drops

¹⁸ Shevelow places the incident between 1741-1744 (285-6), so Kitty was likely in her pre-teen years—still a bit too young to care for herself.

her, and runs into the streets (without her daughter) screaming because she thinks Kitty is dead. During all of this, she is wearing men's clothing. As Charke mourns loudly in the street, she obtains an audience; she writes:

I ran into the Street, with my Shirt-Sleeves dangling loose about my Hands, my Wig standing on End...And Proclaiming the sudden Death of my much-beloved Child, a Crowd soon gathered round me, and, in the Violence of my Distraction, instead of administring any necessary Help wildly stood among the Mob to recount the dreadful Disaster. (52)

Charke is disheveled and her "Wig" is "standing on End." Once she draws in the audience, her "Distraction" becomes too great to remember her daughter. In the following paragraph, she goes on to speculate how her impromptu audience might have felt about her performance: "it drew them into Astonishment, to see the Figure of a young Gentleman, so extravagantly grieved for the loss of a Child" (52). Although the passage begins with an image of her as a distressed mother, Charke quickly shifts into the role of performer. Shevelow points out that because the crowd that gathered around her were unknown to her, this incident with Kitty and the crowd's reaction to it "provides an indication of how she appeared to strangers on the street: that is, to most people she encountered in London. They interpreted Charlotte according to her dress—which, even in its disordered state, signified that she was a man" (286). Once again, a man's wig makes an appearance. Roach writes that the hair "mark[s] all the head as a stage...social hair is performance" (*It* 127). Charke is certainly in a moment of performance here, and she is wearing the wig in a social situation. The quick shift from grieving mother to grieving father occurs when the audience arrives, and this highlights her ability to slip

into and out of roles particularly when she is working with objects. Roach argues, “performers frequently use hairstyle as a marker of their mastery of their preassigned or coveted roles” (*It* 127). Charke’s wig in this scene is a marker of her gender, her emotion, and her performance as a father. The wig is a signifier of Charke’s being in the space between the false gender binary. She laughs at the way people around her think she’s a man and she invites her readers to laugh with her. But she is also showing us a moment of a time when she was for the most part living and working as a man. She carefully exposes a tiny bit of her reality, but only to invite a number of different desires. She is here presenting herself as a handsome man and a grieving father. She is also, through her narrative voice and her “female pen,” presenting herself as a witty author and a good actress. She does not in this moment say, “I wish I were a man” nor does she say “Of course, I wasn’t a man.” All that happens in relation to gender identification is inferred. Thus, she invites the audience to do that inference—to take part in active reading and interpretation—and to pay attention to her performance.

The way Charke presents herself in the role of “mother” is worth a further look as we explore the complexities of gender and sexuality in a cross-dressed body. According to Marilyn Francus, “maternity never becomes one role to play in a series of roles, because motherhood swallows all other identities” (“A-Killing” 273). However, Charke creates a narrative that encompasses multiple roles and only one of them is “mother.” She incorporates maternity into her layers of performance; as Cheryl Wanko writes, “[the text’s] narratological shifts propel Charke into different occupations and different tones. On one page she’s a waiter; on the next she’s a mother” (81). Kitty’s scarce appearance in the text, except to highlight her mother’s good qualities, exemplifies Charke’s desire to

push Kitty out of her narrative; the text is a means of constructing her self and Charke wishes to prevent Kitty from consuming her identity. Once Mrs. Brown is introduced Charke gives little narrative attention to her daughter, mentioning her only when she discusses her hardships. As she groups her daughter together with the other trials that cause her to suffer, her disinterest for her becomes increasingly clear. Near the end of the narrative, her daughter drops out completely; Charke gives no explanation about where Kitty is until she tells us that she has been married for three years (124). Further mentions of her daughter are intertwined with her daughter's husband and his ill treatment of Charke, which leads her to assert her maternity: "the necessary Duty of a Wife...never can or should exempt her from that she owes me; who must while we both exist, be undoubtedly her Mother" (137). She continues, "the Girl would not have been guilty of a Crime of depriving her Mother of the Morsel of Bread she struggled for, had she not been enforced to it by a blind Obedience to an inconsiderable Fool" (137). Charke desires financial assistance from her daughter and son-in-law, but her son-in-law refuses it. Thus, Charke casts him as another hindrance to her self-preservation. In addition, she asserts her maternity only because she believes her daughter is eternally chained to her husband. Her daughter no longer threatens her identity because Kitty is now "Wife" instead of "Daughter." Motherhood is just another skin that Charke slips into and out of in her narrative. Whether or not Kitty chooses to take on a new role and rethink her relationship to her mother, Charke believes Kitty can move out of one character and into the next as easily as Charke herself can.

As a mother in men's clothes, Charke is able to encompass multiple subjectivities at once. This moment is perhaps one of the most significant examples of her fluidity. She

is at once man and woman, father and mother, mad with grief and thrilled with the attentions of her audience. Her ability to so easily become the center of a crowd's attention emphasizes the power she holds in her mysterious performance. And since motherhood is, as Francus notes, a role that consumes all other roles, Charke's ability to slip out of the role of mother and into the role of father/performer highlights her gender fluidity. It is interesting to note that this moment of fluidity coincides with a moment of performance. For Charke, fluidity appears fairly natural, as we will see in the following section. After all, she was an almost immediate sensation in her breeches roles at Drury Lane, and her travesty roles at Fielding's Haymarket Theater enjoyed equal success. Her flair for comedy lies in her ability to perform another gender. But whether on a literal stage or a metaphorical one—as in the instance of her reaction to Kitty's illness—it is when she has a crowd that Charke shines. Her fluidity depends largely upon who is witnessing the performative shifts in her class, gender, or sexuality. In the following section, I examine how, through clothing and other objects, Charke cultivates an audience for herself and subsequently conflates reality and the stage. This results in blurred boundaries between authenticity and performance, which leads to the questioning of boundaries that supposedly separate man and woman, hetero and homo.

V. Charke and Objects

Although clothes certainly serve as gender signifiers in Charke's cross-dressing, for her they are also valuable objects that she struggles to maintain and retain. Charke is constantly changing her clothes. At times, she does so to signify a change in her profession but she mostly changes her outfit out of necessity. She borrows clothes that

she does not have or sells clothes for something she needs more. For Charke, clothes are tools that she uses to manipulate her own character. Clothes can be used to fool people about her social status, to get money when she needs it through selling the clothes themselves or using the clothes she has in her acting jobs, and to even get revenge on an old woman who beat her as a child (13). In *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Chloe Wigston Smith reexamines the function of clothes in fiction. She challenges the argument that clothes are mere representations of the character wearing them; rather, she establishes how “in fiction [clothes] could be reworked and reshaped for a new and more progressive vision of womanhood founded on usefulness and pragmatism” (17). Smith also notes that although her book focuses on the novel, her “investigations into other cultural forms convey how fiction exposed representations of women that trivialized and constrained their clothes and labor by subscribing to familiar customs and conventions surrounding the body, identity, dress, and gender” (11). Similar to the novels Smith examines, Charke’s *Narrative* confronts the conventional representations of women and their clothing through the body of the author. Charke is able to use clothing to obscure her gender, sex, social status, and identity; in taking up a variety of differently gendered clothing as readily as she puts it down, her body becomes a manifestation of fluidity and flexibility.

Charke incorporates discussions of costumes and the theater into descriptions of street clothing and every day life. In doing so, she conflates performance and reality within material culture. In 1741, she is asked to play Captain Plume of George Farquhar’s *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) when the original actor said he did not know his lines. In order to gain a higher wage for the part, Charke shrewdly tells her supplicant, who she

calls “the Lady,” “*To be sure, Ma’am...I’d do anyThing to oblige you: But I’m quite unprepared—I have nothing here proper—I want a Pair of White Stockings, and clean Shirt*” (55). She also confesses to her audience, “Though, between Friends...I had all those Things ready in my Coat-Pocket; as I was certain, let what Part would befall me, Cleanliness was a necessary Ingredient” (55). As a result of her deception, Charke is able to convince the Lady to pay her sixteen shillings to assume the role of Plume. Here clothing is concealed within clothing. The appearance of a lack of a certain type of clothing enables her to acquire a higher pay, though she reveals that she was already prepared for any part that might have come to her. She uses her apparent deficit to press her advantage when she discovers how desperate the Lady is to fill a certain part. This is an illustration of how Charke uses changes in clothing as a method of cleverly flowing into advantageous situations. Her original plan was to get whatever role she could find, and she brought along the white stockings and clean shirt she would no doubt need. But when she sensed an opportunity to play a role, she did not immediately offer her services. Instead of presenting the clothing she had, her pretense of lack gained her more money than she would have gotten in another situation. Charke jumps from vulture to businessman to conman to actor within minutes. These seamless shifts in her character revolve around clothing—more specifically, costumes. Her ability to maneuver the presence of pieces of her costume indicates her ability to control the image she presents her audience. This is important in light of Charke being the object of the reader’s bisexual gaze. Charke problematizes the reader’s trajectory of desire by performing ambiguity and fluidity. The reader is unable to find footing in any particular subjectivity that Charke performs because she shifts her identity so quickly. By doing so, Charke forces the reader

to make sudden adjustments in his/her relationship to the *Narrative*. The reader is fascinated by Charke's ability to scheme her way into more money even as he/she sympathizes with Charke as a mother trying to provide for her child or, later, a lover trying to provide for her female partner, Mrs. Brown. This incident is one of many that demonstrate how easily and quickly Charke changes her self representation. And even as it confirms the lack of authenticity in her performance, it also highlights the way Charke invites multiple readings and multiple trajectories of desire.

Charke frequently describes exchanging clothes with others; these exchanges exhibit the workings of the bisexual gaze between Charke and other people in the eighteenth-century. After she luckily snags the role of Plume, she determines to take precautions against thieves and collection officers. In order to disguise her good fortune, she "change[s] Cloaths with a Person of low Degree, whose happy Rags, and the kind Covert of Night, secured me from the Dangers I might have otherwise encountered" (55-56). This occurs directly before the first appearance of Charke as Mr. Brown and the story of an heiress who falls in love with him. In this episode, the heiress does discover that Charke is a woman but either does not want to believe it or does not mind. Charke writes that the lady "*was too fond of her mistaken Bargain*" (57). Lisa Moore argues that this line "hints that the heiress continued to consider Charke sexually attractive even after she found out she was 'really' a woman" (57). The juxtaposition of these two episodes of disguise and revelation demonstrates how the bisexual gaze works among and between Charke and the characters of her *Narrative*. As the post-Plume actor hoping to avoid losing her money, she enlists the services of a "person of low degree." At this point, Charke is living as a man or at least playing men's roles, and this person she exchanges

clothes with is also a man (56). In this situation Charke's body represents, for the man, an opportunity to get a bit of extra money.¹⁹ Her body is a commodity but in order to become thus it must also become a model for his clothes. Charke puts on his "rags" and he puts on her clothes. She feels safer in her new outfit and he seems only too happy to oblige. The exchange illustrates the give and take of the bisexual gaze. Both object and viewer experience desire and by interacting with each other, their desire evolves. In the case of the heiress, the revelation of Charke's sex simply changes the heiress's trajectory of desire. Though Charke was likely still wearing men's clothes, she tells us that she is clear with the heiress about her sex.²⁰ When the male body becomes a female body, the heiress accepts the change and allows a shift in her own desire to occur.

In addition to clothing, Charke uses other objects to invite the reader's gaze. In 1736, Charke was engaged with Henry Fielding's company at the Haymarket. She lived for a time with her sister, Elizabeth Brett neé Cibber, her brother-in-law, Dawson Brett, and their two children. Charke writes of how she related to the family: "I being a Sort of Creature that was regarded as a favourite Cat or mischievous Monkey about House, was easily put off with what reasonable People might have deemed not only an Inconvenience, but an Affront" (35). This "Affront" was in reference to her being put in the worst apartment of the house. This room suffered from dilapidating walls, threadbare curtains, and furniture that was both small and sparse. One night, after being awoken by the wind, she decides to write a comic verse about her room, which her sister saves until 1755 when Charke includes it in her *Narrative*. She calls this verse a "Description of the

¹⁹ Although with Charke's luck, I do wonder why he did not end up just taking her money.

²⁰ I take Charke at her word in both the incident of the man in rags and the heiress. Though I admit that she could be lying or at least exaggerating, for the purposes of my argument it is not constructive to challenge the validity of her *Narrative*. That is a worthy project that I will leave to other critics.

Room” and an “exact Inventory of [her] Chattels” (35). In actuality she seems to be making fun of her own destitution. Through this process of cataloging her woefully dismal furnishings, she acknowledges the fleeting nature of material goods and her own lack of desire to hang onto them:

There is a Chest of Drawers too, I think,
Which seems a Trough, where Pigeons drink;
A Handkerchief and Cap’s as much as they’ll contain:
O! but I keep no Gowns—so need not to complain.

Then, for my Fire; I’ve an Inch of Stove,
Which I often grieve I cannot move
When I travel from the Chimney t’ th’ Door,
Which are Miles full Three, if not Fourscore.

By that Time I, shiv’ring, arrive,
I doubtful grow if I’m alive.
Two foreign Screens I have, in Lieu
Of Tongs and Poker—nay, Faith, Shovel, too....

So charming thin, the Darns so neat,
With great Conveniency expel the Heat:
But these Things will not ever last;
Each day a Curtain I, in breathing, waste.

Then, for Chairs; I indeed have one;
But, since Ruin draws so swiftly on,
Will lett [*sic*] my Room, ere Chair, Screens,
And Curtains all are gone. (35-36)

Her tone is sarcastic and reveals the meagerness of her material life. Her drawers are tiny; her room and bed are cold. She has no tools for her small fire, and her bed Curtains are thread-bare. She owns little (“I keep no Gowns”) and what she lives with will crumble to dust at any moment (“Each day a Curtain I, in breathing, waste”). Yet her darkly comic tone conveys flippancy over the objects that surround her. She recognizes that she will not be there long; perhaps “Ruin draws so swiftly on” even refers to her own looming mortality, but considering how preoccupied she is with money, it seems more likely that this line is in reference to her uncertain financial future. No matter the circumstances, she plans to stay and rent the room from her sister until her things are all “gone.” Whether they might disappear from decay or from her need to pawn her material goods for money, which she does often, is unclear. However, we know that because this end “draws so swiftly on,” the objects she describes will not be with her much longer—or, rather, she will not be with them much longer. The entire verse reveals that Charke’s material life is fluid and in flux. She is ready to let go of objects at a moment’s notice and she even uses her poverty to entertain her readers.

Charke’s verse is similar to Jonathan Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1732) which the author also calls an “Inventory” (ln. 10). In Swift’s poem, as in Charke’s, the reader is treated to a descriptive list of meager objects. Both poems exhibit a general

sense of looking behind the curtain. However, both the narrator's perspective and the purpose of each inventory differs. Charke's verse is from her point of view and her description is a performance: "Good people, for awhile give Ear,/ 'Till I've describ'd my Furniture" (35). The purpose of her verse is to entertain. She possesses all the objects she describes and she is very much in control of what readers see and what we do not see. However, Celia of Swift's poem has no control over what the narrator chooses to reveal through the snooping Strephon. Swift's poem tells the story of a man sneaking into a woman's dressing room without her permission and rifling through her things with a violent curiosity. Strephon begins by examining the elements of Celia's performance, her outer layers, such as her "smock" (ln. 11) and her makeup (ln. 33-36). Then he moves on to more intimate objects that come into close contact with her body like what she wears at night (ln. 53); his sensual observations of her "Bason" (ln. 39), "Towels" (ln. 44), and "Handkerchiefs" (ln. 49) emphasize how he is methodically peeling away her performance and he becomes further acquainted with her unmasked body. By the time he foolishly discovers what comes out of her body (lns. 115-118), he seems to have an understanding of her interiority. As much as he has been enamored with Celia's costume, which emits beauty and disguises her humanness, he is now "blind/ To all the Charms of Female Kind" (129-130). In "A Lady's Dressing Room," the narrator assumes that all women are secretly disgusting under an elaborate disguise of perfection. The narrator's suggestion that Celia should "better learn to keep/ Those Secrets of the hoary deep!" (lns. 97-98) implies that the inner workings of women's bodies are akin to the horrors of hell and should be concealed if women do not want to chase men away. Strephon's process of discovery is the process of the original concept of the male gaze as it actively consumes

the female body without her participation. Swift invites audiences to experience a heterosexual, masculinist trajectory of desire that is invasive and violent.

Charke's inventory, like Swift's, invites a kind of gaze. Because her verse is from her perspective, readers are much less intrusive. We lose the perverted titillation that comes with uninvited exploration, but we gain insight into multiple trajectories of desire. When Charke refers to "Handkerchiefs" and "Gowns" (35), she invites us to read and interpret her body. However, she denies access to any physical or emotional interiority. Unlike Celia, who could not prevent Strephon from penetrating her depths, Charke has the ability to control how far her audience is allowed to go. In her poem, as in the rest of her *Narrative*, we are never privy to her sexual body or sexual encounters. Yet, she reveals just enough for us to know they exist. She mentions her "lovely Bed, of verdant Hue" (36), and the green color might recall spring and awakening sexuality. But she never takes the verse to an overtly sexual place. Charke tantalizes and invites desire because of her mysteriousness. She does not necessarily allow us to be voyeurs; rather, she asks us to bare witness to her life. This position of witness becomes attractive because the audience can ultimately decide how to participate in that witnessing: depending upon our different desires, we can arrive at different interpretations.

Joseph Roach writes, "In children's games, the player ritually chosen to be 'it' is simultaneously elected and ostracized. There is a kind of freakishness to having It; and despite the allure, a potential for monstrosity" (*It* 11). As Charke invites us to witness her life, she embodies this process of being "it." She singles herself out as the "freakish" Other who has no firm gender, sexuality, or material possessions. As Chris Rojek reminds us, "Celebrity is bound up with transgression" because "celebrity divides the individual

from ordinary social life” (177-8). Charke separates herself from the norm through cross-dressing and even further separates herself from other female memoirists by refusing to discuss her sexual encounters. Instead, it is her focus on objects that emphasizes her desire to be a celebrity and, in turn, invites multiple trajectories of desire from her readers.

VI. Conclusion: Charles Brown and Jo Calderone

Much of Charke scholarship was born out of the performance theory boom in the 1990’s. Her theatricality, cross-dressing, and refusal to offer authenticity made her a perfect case study for arguments on gender performance and performativity. But her critical afterlife must now shift; as we remain true to the fluidity of Charke’s body, we must begin to explore the new possibilities that present themselves in this twenty-first century critical moment. This chapter enters into a discussion of Charke from the perspective of the current eighteenth-century critical climate by exploring the different trajectories of desire that Charke invites through a *Narrative* marked by movement. In order to continue to move forward with eighteenth-century studies, we must begin looking at the eighteenth century through the lens of the twenty-first century. With rapidly expanding queer theory, our understanding of gender and sexuality is continuously growing. Considering these evolutions, I use the presence of Mrs. Brown in Charke’s text alongside Charles Brown, what people often refer to as her “alter ego,” to demonstrate how we can move forward by looking back from this particular critical moment.

Scholars have debated whether or not the relationship between Charke and Mrs. Brown was sexual. However, in this section, rather than highlight the relationship itself, I look more closely at how Charke took on another name (Charles Brown) and how Charles existed with Mrs. Brown apart from Charke herself. In many ways, Mr. Brown was a real person, separate from Charlotte Charke—so much so that his companion or wife, Mrs. Brown, is known only by her married surname in Charke's autobiography. For Charke, Mr. Brown is an alter ego and an alternative, male identity. Charlotte Charke infuses theatrical performance into her everyday life; she breaks the frame of the stage through cross-dressing and fully *becoming* a different person (Mr. Brown). Rather than Charlotte Charke in drag, she *creates* a male alter ego and then that alter ego exists separately from its creator. When she takes on the character of Mr. Brown, her physical body is the same but she has used performance to call a new being into existence. And she revels in this performance; she enjoys embodying someone different. For Charke, her male alter ego is more than just an on-stage performance. She creates a life narrative in which Mr. Brown exists off-stage.

In addition to living as Mr. Brown, Charke was also a popular actress in both breeches and travesty roles. The costumes that helped her cultivate her celebrity were the same costumes she took on in her everyday life. She weaves her lives so thoroughly, that it is nearly impossible to determine the difference between Charlotte/Mr. Brown on-stage and Charlotte/Mr. Brown off-stage. Ultimately, Mr. Brown is a representation of a *separation* of a differently gendered being *that is not actually separate* from its original physical body. Charke's Mr. Brown identity has contributed largely to her fame in eighteenth-century scholarship. Her celebrity among critics matches our contemporary

notions of celebrity—everyone wants a piece of her; everyone wants to write about her. As scholars, we have idolized her as a model of queer life in the eighteenth century, and the foundation of the image we have constructed is her cross-dressing and her Mr. Brown character. Cross-dressing and questions about sexuality also play a major role in the career of pop diva and fashion icon, Lady Gaga. The similarities between Gaga and Charke make the deep eighteenth century²¹ visible, and we can better understand gender and sexuality then and now by juxtaposing these two women's lives.

In 2011, Lady Gaga introduced her alter ego, Jo Calderone, to her fans. She used makeup and clothing to slightly alter her features and she took on a completely different personality as Jo. Audiences at the 2011 MTV Video Music Awards received a pleasant and (for some) confusing surprise when Jo Calderone opened the night with a monologue about his life with Lady Gaga. He described their relationship and he delineated a clear separation between his body and hers. After this monologue, Calderone performed Gaga's song, "Yoü and I." Though his voice sounded like Lady Gaga's, his movements were stereotypically masculine—even when he jumped down from the piano and fell. Throughout the rest of the night, the camera cut to Calderone for reaction shots—perhaps attempting to see if Gaga would expose herself, but Calderone remained and Gaga did not show. When he presented the Video Vanguard award to Britney Spears, he admitted that he masturbated to her picture when he was a teenager and he implied that he wanted to kiss her. Spears seemed unsure how to respond and reaction shots of Kanye West and Jay-Z embodied the rest of the audience's confusion. In a discussion of Calderone's appearance at the VMAs, Nicole James, an MTV reporter wrote, "[Gaga] has us all

²¹ This term, famously coined by Joseph Roach in his book *It*, refers to "one that isn't over yet. It stays alive among us as a repertoire of long-running performances" (13).

scratching our heads....Is Jo Calderone some kind of performance art, or is Lady Gaga actually becoming Jo Calderone?” James’ questions reflect nearly every media outlet’s reaction to Calderone—mainly, bewilderment. Jo Calderone exists separately from Gaga. He has a life of his own complete with past adolescent fantasies and personal Twitter account. Like Charke’s Mr. Brown, when Gaga cross-dresses she is not just Lady Gaga in drag. She becomes Jo Calderone—a different person.

The Charlotte Charke/Mr. Brown relationship parallels the Lady Gaga/Jo Calderone one through embodied gender performance and fluid sexuality. In addition, they both write about their cross-dressing performances—Charke in her autobiography and Gaga in a *V Magazine* piece. It is through this self-representation that we find the window into Charke through Lady Gaga. In her “V Magazine Gaga Memorandum,” Gaga claims that Calderone “has been a deliberate attack on the ‘idea’ of the ‘modern model,’ or...the ‘modern pop singer,’” and she asks, “In a culture that attempts to quantify beauty with a visual paradigm and almost mathematical standard, how can we fuck with the malleable minds of onlookers and shift the world’s perspective on what’s beautiful?” Her answer to this question is drag. Gaga’s analysis of her own performance is a fascinating theoretical discussion that addresses the question of how one craft’s performance to defy expectations and push gender boundaries. She admits, “in the fantasy of performance, I imagined (or hoped) the world would weigh both individuals against one another as real people, not as one person playing two. Lady Gaga versus Jo Calderone, not Lady Gaga ‘as.’” In 2011, the public did not seem ready to accept that Lady Gaga (a construction herself) can construct an entirely new person; yet, they also could not comfortably discuss Calderone simply as an alter-ego because he establishes himself as a body

separate from Gaga. The public's confusion seems to be just what Gaga wanted. In the section from *V Magazine*, she expresses a desire to change the ideological way in which American society defines beauty. This is a daunting, if not impossible, task. Yet by constructing an entirely new person in Jo Calderone, Gaga has at least succeeded in causing audiences to question their perceptions of femininity, masculinity, and the qualities of beauty attributed exclusively to one gender or another. Admittedly, Gaga has a larger public platform than Charke had, and Gaga's description of her project (as deliberate performance art) is different than Charke's description of her narrative (as a means for entertainment and an apology to her father). However, if we take the obviously stated ideas in Gaga's piece and read them alongside Charke's *Narrative*, with the help of critics like Kristina Straub and Marilyn Morris, we find that both performers are embodying a fluidity of gender and sexuality that is perplexing to the societies of their respective eras.

Because of contemporary technology, we could argue that Lady Gaga is never really "off-stage" in the way that Charke was. Then again, we might also argue that Charke never really stopped performing—even in her everyday life. The issue here is that we have access to Gaga in real time. I could go on Google right now and find out exactly where she is and what she is doing.²² I could also find out—through Twitter—what Jo Calderone is doing. Technology allows Lady Gaga *and* Jo Calderone to exist simultaneously on social media. If Gaga wanted, she could orchestrate a conversation between herself and Calderone on Twitter. Charke did not have this particular performance tool. In the eighteenth-century version of writing oneself—the autobiography—Charke does describe her life as Mr. Brown living with Mrs. Brown. But

²² This is the disturbing reality of celebrity obsession interacting with twenty-first-century technology.

even though in certain sections she does write in Mr. Brown's voice, her audience knows that Charke is the narrator. Someone could stumble onto Jo Calderone's Twitter and never know that Lady Gaga (or her PR team) is behind it. Social media allows Gaga to separate her body and Jo Calderone's body *for her audience* in a way that Charke could not. *But* looking at Charke and Gaga side-by-side can aid our understanding of eighteenth-century celebrity and performance. Both women cultivate their celebrity by embracing off-stage performance and living as men. While Lady Gaga has the advantages of social media that Charke did not, the separation of Gaga's body and Calderone's body can clarify Charke's *Narrative*. When they take on the character of Mr. Brown or Jo Calderone, their physical bodies are the same, but they have used performance to call a new being into existence. And they both revel in this performance; they enjoy embodying someone different. For both women, their male alter egos are more than just an on-stage performance; Charke and Gaga create narratives in which Mr. Brown and Jo Calderone exist off-stage. The ability to create another, differently gendered body through one's own body cracks open the endless possibilities of desire—particularly when Mr. Brown settles in with Mrs. Brown and when Calderone talks about sex with Gaga.

Gaga is still reinventing herself. After the hyper sexualized house music of her *Artpop* album (2013), she took on the character of a vocal ingenue and recorded a number of jazz standards with Tony Bennet on their joint album, *Cheek to Cheek* (2014). On Instagram, she has emphasized her dog mom performance and she promotes the fashion and modeling career of one of her dogs, Miss Asia Kinney, who was just featured in an advertisement for Coach. Like Jo Calderone, Miss Asia also has her own social media account. The way Gaga is consistently both changing her image and adding new personas

to her repertoire is both perplexing and enticing; a drive to want to know who or what Gaga really is and an inability to ever actually discover that ‘truth’ keeps us continuously pursuing her. Lady Gaga is in the process of refashioning celebrity performance in the twenty-first century by calling attention to performativity, construction, and the very *inauthentic* nature of celebrity itself. Like the actresses that Laura Engel analyzes, Gaga fashions her celebrity through performance while also blurring the lines between stereotypical masculinity and femininity. In addition, Gaga takes this construction a step further: her performance calls for complete eradication of the definitive line between man and woman, hetero and homo. Charke’s complex *Narrative* provides the same type of unknowable and alluring mystique. Our inability to fully understand her is what keeps us coming back for more critical interpretations. This fluidity, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, is what helps Gaga and Charke fashion their celebrity.

In this chapter, I have outlined the layers of Charke’s performance through the material culture described in her *Narrative*. Just as Charke takes on and sheds the objects in her life, so also she moves between and within differing genders and sexualities. She invites both the people she interacts with in life and the readers she interacts with through the page to participate in encountering multiple trajectories of desire. By examining her as a celebrity, we can identify how distance, performance, and a lack of a ‘real’ self contributes to her magnetism, particularly as an object of a scholarly bisexual gaze. When we interact with Charke as critics, we furnish new readings and, subsequently, new identities for her. All that we can grasp is her fluidity—and even then it is not fully tangible. Charke’s fluidity is bolstered by her life in the theater and the format of the autobiography. In the following chapter, I shift the question of fluidity and desire to focus

on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. But, as the next chapter will show, theatricality is still present in the novel, and that performative element of drama continues to reveal bisexual possibilities as we enter into the late eighteenth century and continue to view it through the lens of the twenty-first.

Charke's *Narrative* challenges us to consider how eighteenth-century sexualities can be unfixed and unstable. Her memoir both fits into numerous theoretical frameworks and also resists absolute labels so much so that critics often become frustrated with her slippery text. But it is this very instability that makes Charke so valuable to my project. Our inability to pin her down is what makes her appealing and it is also what makes her a representation of unnameable sexualities. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price and Mary Crawford, despite the games they play, have a much more clearly defined relationship than Charke and all her conquests. The following chapter demonstrates how even a linear narrative in such a structured framework as the Regency era marriage market can still have space for flexibility and fluidity within female sexualities. The chapter addresses the affect of space on a queer body's levels of comfort or discomfort. However, unlike Charke, who consistently returns to a position of unsolvable puzzle, Mary and Fanny retreat—almost automatically and somewhat apathetically—to arguably heteronormative spaces in society. And we discover that the ending of Austen's novel gestures toward the violent, purposeful squashing of sexually fluid possibilities in Baillie's *Witchcraft*.

Chapter 2

Flirting with the Boundaries of Time:

Theater, Bisexuality, and Performance in *Mansfield Park*

I. Introduction

In September 2015, Robert Clark published an article in *Country Life Magazine* detailing his theory that the main house in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) was inspired by the real-life Castle Ashby in Northamptonshire. Clark argues that Austen admired Spencer Perceval (1762-1812), the only British Prime Minister to have ever been assassinated, and his abolitionist views. Perceval's cousin, 1st Marquess of Northampton, Charles Compton (1760-1828), lived at Castle Ashby with his wife, Maria Compton. Maria's sister, Elizabeth Chute, was close friends with Cassandra Austen, and Clark argues that this map of social connections indicate the reason Austen set *Mansfield Park*

in Northamptonshire: “Once the context is understood and the textual hints decoded, we discover that, in this novel, Austen was offering the cognoscenti reader a witty engagement with contemporary politics” (Clark quot. in Furness). Since the early 1800s, Austen has been a darling of English heritage. The country’s love, pride, and esteem for her has even reached official government status; in 2013, it was announced that her face will be on the next 10-pound note. While all six of her completed novels—and her Juvenilia and incomplete works—are mass produced all over the world, there is among most of the public a clear consensus that *Mansfield Park* is the least favorite Austen novel. In her discussion of Richard Clark’s find in *The Telegraph*, Hannah Furness casually refers to the novel as “Austen’s least-loved book” and off-handedly notes that it “has often been overlooked in the Austen canon by modern readers, with fans preferring the storylines and heroines of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma*.” Furness’ comments reflect the opinion of most Janeites (Jane Austen fans). While *Mansfield Park* is still an Austen novel, it is not nearly as popular as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), or even *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, both posthumously published in 1817. What a number of scholars have discovered, however, is that *Mansfield Park* is one of Austen’s most complex and interesting novels; the theatricality, performance, and sexuality found in Fanny Price’s coming-of-age story clashes with the plot’s apparently chaste and moral ending.

The desire to discover as much as possible about Austen’s life and work has kept scholars busy since her death in 1817. Born to the rector and his wife in the village of Steventon on 11 November 1775, Jane Austen lead—on the surface—a rather quiet life. She lived with her parents and then just her mother for most of her life, and she shared a

close relationship with her sister, Cassandra. But, as Claire Tomalin points out in her 1997 biography of the famous author, Jane's work reflects a life of more than just bonnets, piano, and embroidery. Her parents ran a boys' school when she was a child, so she must have witnessed a great deal of rowdy excitement, even though she was sent away to boarding school in Oxford at the age of 7. She had two devastating romantic entanglements, one of which ended because she was too poor to make a satisfactory wife for her beloved Tom Leroy. In her early life, she stayed with her parents, traveled a little, and wrote much. But when, in 1800, her parents uprooted the Austens from their family home in Steventon and moved them to Bath, Jane sunk into a deep sadness. Tomalin writes that "the ejection from Steventon...depressed her deeply enough to disable her as a writer" (173). Her low spirits plagued her until they moved back to the country and got a home in Chawton village. At Chawton, Jane began to write and revise again and shortly after their move she published *Sense and Sensibility* to moderate success. Thanks to the profits from *Sense and Sensibility* and later *Pride and Prejudice*, she was able to travel and maintain a decent measure of freedom. Neither she nor Cassandra ever married, but Jane experienced society through her wide network of cousins. As she began writing *Mansfield Park* in 1811, she witnessed a variety of sex scandals among the upper class, including the Duke of Clarence's removal of his long-time mistress and mother of his 10 children, Dorothy Jordan, as well as Princess Charlotte's incessant flirtations with a number of inappropriate men. In response to these scandals, Jane wrote. Tomalin argues, "*Mansfield Park* is, among other things, a novel about the condition of England, and addresses itself to the questions raised by royal behavior and the kind of society it encouraged" (224-225).

While critics have certainly written at length about *Mansfield Park*, the possibility of bisexuality among the female characters has been largely unnoticed thus far. Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka argues for a lesbian subplot and George Haggerty examines possibilities of queerness in *Mansfield Park*; in addition, critics such as Terry Castle and Eve Sedgwick have identified queer possibilities in Austen's life and other works. However, bisexuality—which we have established is more specific than “queer” but different from “lesbian” or even “homosexual” desire—is an important aspect of Austen's work that has yet to be thoroughly explored. The adaptations of *Mansfield Park*, particularly Patricia Rozema's 1999 Miramax film, have also had some critical consideration. However, discussions of Rozema's piece focus heavily on Fanny and the differences between her persona in Austen's novel versus her persona in Rozema's film. This chapter brings together novel and cinematic adaptation through an examination of the relationship between Austen's Fanny Price and Mary Crawford; by placing eighteenth-century novel and twenty-first-century interpretation alongside one another, this chapter offers insight into the presence of performance and sexual desire in the novel. The establishment of these two women as foils invites a strong comparison of their journeys throughout the novel. As their relationship grows closer and they have romantic entanglements with each other and with each other's close male relatives, their connection becomes more than a literary device. Fanny and Mary are bound up in sexual desire and romantic intrigue. The closer one looks at their relationship, the more one recognizes the codes of courtship and eroticism present in their interactions. Austen's prose in *Mansfield Park* often reads like a description of a stage on which Fanny and Mary move purposefully, using props to guide their interactions and signify their own

characteristics. Thus, the best way to interpret their relationship is through the bisexual gaze, which appears between bodies on stage, in contact, and in motion. I use the theory of the bisexual gaze as a lens to consider the ways bodies interact in Austen's novel. This chapter will put into practice what Laura Engel identifies as the "at times haunted process of working out the presence of theatricality and acting in narrative form." (*Austen, Actresses, and Accessories* Ch. 2). Using queer theoretical frameworks of embodied difference and comfort to problematize the theatricality of looking in *Mansfield Park* enables us to develop a stronger understanding of Fanny and Mary's complex relationship. We can then see how theatricality and sexuality flow from the novel into its criticism and adaptations.

II. *Mansfield Park: History of Reception*

Like all of Austen's novels, *Mansfield Park* boasts a 200-year-long critical history. However, it is her most complex and debatable work, and readers' split opinions about Fanny especially began almost as soon as Austen published the novel. While much of the public praised the novel's "championing of morality and criticism of corrupted standards," Austen's mother was entirely bored with Fanny's goodness (Tomalin 225). Cassandra Austen, Jane's sister, appreciated Fanny but wished she had married Henry Crawford; as Tomalin points out, this "suggests that the 'moral tendency' so much admired by other readers did not impress [Cassandra] much" (226). The general consensus of much of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century criticism tends to credit Fanny with an admirably unwavering morality—although some, such as Ruth Bernard Yeazell, challenge the definition and practice of morality within *Mansfield*.

While critics admit that Mary is a much more interesting character, many of them think the novel asks us to “believe that she is not to be admired, that her lively mind compounds, by very reason of its liveliness, with the world, the flesh, and the devil” (Lionel Trilling 128). However, the last thirty years have produced a great deal of controversy over the themes within *Mansfield Park* and the conclusions and ‘morals’ the novel actually conveys.

In the late twentieth century, scholars began tackling *Mansfield Park*’s complex contradictions in a lively, occasionally heated critical debate. There developed, in my view, two critical camps—the conservative and the liberal:²³ the first is adamant about Jane Austen’s genius; critics in the conservative camp believe that *Mansfield Park* is a morally upright work and that Fanny is the novel’s intended heroine—a champion of propriety and goodness. This camp is full of traditional Austen scholars that are rather outraged by the discussions of sexuality in her work. For example, in 2002 Brian Southam published an article that argues with critics who read bawdy humor in Austen’s novels. His main target is Jill Heydt-Stevenson who’s 2000 article, “‘Slipping into the Ha-Ha’: Bawdy Humor and Body Politics in Jane Austen’s Novels,” would later appear in her book-length study, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (2005), which offers a new reading of Austen’s work alongside eighteenth-century slang and sexually suggestive classical and literary references. In her

²³ One could argue for a third camp that questions the quality of *Mansfield Park* and argues that it is not as nuanced nor as intricate as her previous works. These critics might view *Mansfield* as the odd novel out—still worth our attention, but only to show how Austen’s other novels shine. This view comes largely out of Austen’s contemporary readers and a small, but influential, collection of mid-twentieth-century readers like Kingsley Amis and Lionel Trilling. However, the waves of articles on *Mansfield Park* that has been steadily flowing over the last forty years indicate, to me, that the view of *Mansfield* as a lesser novel is no longer a valid critical argument. The general consensus is much nearer what Claudia Johnson writes in her 1995 article, “What Became of Jane Austen?”: “*Mansfield Park* is simply not the conventional novel we have taken it for” (69).

article and book, Heydt-Stevenson points out that Mary makes a joke about sodomy when she discusses the “circle of admirals” she met in her uncle’s home: “Of *Rears*, and *Vices*, I saw enough. Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat” (*Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions* 62). This passage has become extremely controversial as critics argue over whether or not this really is a joke about male love in the British Navy. Southam insists that it is not; he argues, “homosexuality...was the forbidden topic and was not to be found even in the trashiest novels of the period” (25). He goes on to lament that “the pun has become caught up in something much larger and more damaging than a matter of purely local interpretation; it has become involved in a wider campaign to promote the idea of a bawdy or dirty-joke Jane Austen” (30). Southam strongly condemns any reading of sexual innuendo into Austen’s work, believing those readings to be damaging to her character as an author. He is not the only scholar to insist that her novels “provided safe and sanitary reading” free from “indecent humor” (25) and that they found their power “strictly within the terms of polite fiction...without transgressing its literary and social decorum” (33). While Southam is certainly one of the strongest contemporary voices of this first camp, he follows a tradition of well-known critics such as Giulia Giuffre²⁴ and Lionel Trilling. Trilling famously argues for the chastity and severity of *Mansfield Park*: “Its impulse is not for social freedom but for social stasis. It takes full notice of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, but only to reject them as having nothing to do with virtue and happiness, as being, indeed, deterrents to the good life” (127). While

²⁴ Although Giuffre’s 1983 article *does* directly address sexuality as a theme, her arguments are conservative. She believes Fanny’s “true sexual attractiveness” (88) is the result of her ability to withstand the temptation of pleasures, particularly theatrical ones. She compares Fanny to a nun with “virginal” (77) qualities and is satisfied with the ending because it indicates, in her view, that Edmund has learned a valuable lesson when he chooses the beauty of Fanny’s purity and goodness over Mary’s more appealing body.

these critics are by no means questioning Austen's brilliance, they fear some contemporary scholars' readings are overreaching in order to make Austen seem more scandalous than she is. This conservative camp implements largely new historicist and formalist readings of Austen's work to examine how the novels engage with their late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century temporal homes. The goals are historical accuracy and genuine representation: to consider how Austen and her readers would actually engage with the texts. Unfortunately, many of the arguments from this first critical camp err on the side of conservatism, and spend more time defending "genuine" readings of Austen than developing new ideas about a body of work that continues to feel relevant to twenty-first century audiences.

The second camp is equally insistent on Austen's genius, but argues that the novel is a witty, ironic tale of sexuality and theatricality. These more liberal scholars argue that a careful reader can see how the novel embraces Mary as the heroine and often privileges her "sparkling dark" eyes over Fanny's "soft light" ones (*MP* 484). In her essay on Fanny and Austen's intentions for her character, Nina Auerbach argues that Fanny is a representative of a "rapt audience" (214): her "fierce spectatorship forces our reluctant identification" (212). For Auerbach, Fanny is a brooding Byronic hero—a roaming Romantic heroine, rather than a heroine of a romantic comedy. While Auerbach ventures over to the first camp in her interpretation of Fanny as the heroine, her description of Fanny as "a killjoy, a blighter of ceremonies and divider of families" (211) and her praises of the "deliberately designed" ending that Austen purposefully made unsatisfying and ill fit for the genre of Romantic Comedy indicates a more liberal reading. Auerbach's description of Fanny (who, it should be noted, she really enjoys as a Byronic heroine)

hints at the far more scandalous readings of that character—the most controversial of which involves incest. In her 1987 article, Johanna Smith argues that Fanny and Edmund’s relationship has “incestuous overtones” (1), because from the beginning of the novel they are raised “always together like brothers and sisters” (*MP* 7). Although Mrs. Norris says a relationship between them is “morally impossible” (*MP* 7), audiences often read Fanny and Edmund alongside Austen’s other heroine/hero couples: Elizabeth and Darcy, Anne and Captain Wentworth, Emma and Knightley. The romances could not appear more different. Perhaps this is because, as George Haggerty notes, “fraternal love is positioned in [*Mansfield Park*] as an alternative to erotic love” (181). He argues that Fanny is “at war with her own feelings” (179) as she struggles to reconcile her rigid morality with what Haggerty identifies as her incestuous love for Edmund.²⁵ Through this, Austen creates a new way of looking at love: “Only the cosily familiar love of quasi-siblings can be depended on as sustaining and meaningful” (Haggerty 186).

Terry Castle also finds an emphasis on sibling love in Austen’s letters. In her extremely controversial book review, “Sister-Sister,” she suggests that the letters exchanged between Austen and her sister, Cassandra, contain an “underlying eros” (*London Review of Books* 17.15).²⁶ There are passages that, according to Castle, “remind us strikingly of how important a role clothes have played in the subliminal fetish-life of women” and that “Austen and Cassandra were hardly exempt” (*LRB* 17.15). Janeites of the press and scholarly critics alike were horrified at what they perceived to be Castle

²⁵ Haggerty is fully aware that marriage between cousins is not generally considered incestuous in the eighteenth century. His argument flows from the premise that because Fanny was raised as a sister to Edmund *and* because her love for Edmund is often juxtaposed alongside her love for her brother, William, her relationship with Edmund could possibly be considered incestuous.

²⁶ Although I note the issue from which each comment originates, they can all be found in the archived version of Castle’s article.

arguing that Austen and Cassandra had an incestuous lesbian relationship. Brian Southam proclaimed her review a “distortion” and a “comic” and “grotesque” mishandling of the letters (*LRB* 17.17). Castle received so much critical backlash that she responded in the next issue of the *LRB*, published just three weeks after her original article. She corrected her critics and restated her initial argument: “that Austen’s relationship with Cassandra was unquestionably the most important emotional relationship of her life...[and] had its unconscious homoerotic dimensions” (*LRB* 17.16). Castle’s comments sparked a heated debate over the next nine issues in which a variety of scholars weighed in on the topic of Jane Austen’s sexuality. Arguments ranged from regret that Castle’s essay would have been stronger if she “had only looked at the right kind of evidence” (Julia Gasper 17.22) to a rather hilarious insistence, made under a mistaken gender assignment, that Austen’s cutting remarks about men were observed by Castle in “what may be a typical masculine fashion” and that Castle’s misinterpretations of the gown Austen describes for Cassandra are due to “his” ignorance: “Has he never read a fashion magazine?” (Marianne Macdonald 17.16).²⁷

Claudia Johnson reads rather like the voice of reason when she writes, “I hope the public will forgive me for protracting the debate long enough, I hope, to clarify it.” She identifies “two contending traditions of Austenian reception that have prevailed since the mid-19th century, and that have clashed” in the *London Review*: those “adhering to the elegiac tradition” and those willing to discuss sexuality in Austen’s life and work (17.19). The debate continues after Johnson’s piece and includes attacks on her arguments as well

²⁷ The printing of Macdonald’s piece without notifying her of her mistake was a bit mean, but it is hard to resist enjoying the delightfully wicked comment an editor at the *London Review* added just below the Macdonald piece: “We wonder what Ms Macdonald would have written had she been alert to the fact that Terry Castle is a woman” (17.16).

as Castle's, but I wish to linger on Johnson's most insightful take on the controversy: she wonders, "perhaps people won't be satisfied until they see the 1-word" (17.19). Johnson gestures toward the idea that fans, scholars, and scholarly fans have all created a particular image of Austen—however conservative or liberal that image may be—that they try to protect from blemish. When the subject of sexuality arises, Janeites are forced to picture Austen's sexual body. For most, this threatens to damage their view of Austen as asexual literary goddess. Castle's interpretation of Jane and Cassandra's letters produced a theatrical mental image in which the two sisters' bodies interact with queer possibilities. Castle asks us to imagine Jane and Cassandra's bodies performing in a theatrical space of queer possibility that clashes with the popular image of Austen's chastity and purity. Her argument not only connects Austen's body with queerness but also brings this idea into the public sphere. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have (in)famously argued that heterosexual sex and/or intimacy of any kind between bodies has been systematically privatized since the late eighteenth century ("Sex in Public" 166), and that—being buried under the social necessity of privacy—queer bodies "ha[ve] almost no institutional matrix for [their] counterintimacies" (173). Queer culture lacks the public space that heterosexual culture takes for granted. Thus, when queer intimacy arises where it is unexpected or perhaps even unwanted, as in Castle's article, the initial reaction involves feelings of discomfort. When considering Jane and Cassandra's letters, Castle suggests we imagine their bodies participating in a non-normative intimacy. However, those that have a set vision of Austen's body as normative (or perhaps having no particular bent toward intimacy which is non-normative but also less threatening to normativity) feel *discomfort* in being asked to imagine a queer trajectory of desire play

out between Jane and Cassandra's bodies. Thus, they react to their feelings of discomfort with expressions of fear and anger. Yet as Berlant and Warner insist, bringing embodied difference to the forefront of culture and imagination assists in the queer world building that provides a space for non-normative intimacies to comfortably exist. Castle's article broadens our view of Austen *and her work*; subsequently, the article cultivates increasing visibility of non-normative intimacy within Austen's novels.

Eve Sedgwick received just as much backlash as Castle for her article, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," in which she uses Marianne Dashwood's descriptions of her own body in *Sense and Sensibility* to explore how she might be considered as having a "masturbatory identity" (837). She also argues that Marianne's sexuality involves an attraction to both women and men because she loves her own body; she characterizes autoeroticism as homoerotic and calls it "the female figure of love that keeps forgetting its name" (837). Sedgwick's article used *Sense and Sensibility* as a case study to contribute a new idea about sexual identity and self-love to the field of queer theory and sexuality studies. Even though some Austen scholars were outraged by her arguments, Sedgwick's ideas are upheld as part of canonical Jane Austen criticism precisely because she uses contemporary psychoanalytic concepts of identity politics to embrace the kind of oscillating sexual attraction that is not solely rooted in normativity. The literature, for Sedgwick and for myself, is a case study for a larger exploration of what Austen's work can teach us about eighteenth-century sexuality and, subsequently, what her work can teach us about comfort, discomfort, and embodied difference within twenty-first-century sexuality.

III. Mansfield Park: *Female Queerness and Performance*

Rather than use the novel to discover more about the author *or* use the author to prove a point about the novel,²⁸ I suggest we consider *Mansfield Park* through the lens of contemporary theory in order to further the work of critics like Terry Castle and Eve Sedgwick: to broaden our understanding of Austen's work and to allow eighteenth-century literature to come alive for audiences reading it in a twenty-first context. By no means am I making a definitive claim about how Austen would have wanted us to read her novels—this will remain a mystery to myself and my fellow Janeites unless more writing about her work is found. Nor do I suggest that our twenty-first-century notions of identity politics appear in an eighteenth-century novel. Far from it: in my reading of *Mansfield Park*, twenty-first century theories build a springboard off of which comes further illumination of what Laura Engel calls Austen's "theatrical narrative strategies." In her new book, Engel examines "the role of the muff as an object that signifies suggestive contradictions between authenticity and performance, secrets and exposure, aristocracy and disgrace" and enables readers to "notice the ways in which Austen's narrative strategies are much more theatrical than we might imagine. Austen relies on a slippage between illusion and reality similar to the experience of being in the theater, where in the specific moment of the performance the spectator believes that what he or she is watching exists but then is always reminded that the performance ends" (*Austen, Actresses, and Accessories* Introduction). Although her study looks specifically at *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*, Engel's description of Austen's theatrical narrative style can certainly apply to most of Austen's other work—particularly

²⁸ I believe Brian Southam and Giulia Giuffrè both slip into this pattern of using the author's life or what the author would have done in order to read those circumstances and behaviors into her novel.

Mansfield Park. Engel also skillfully demonstrates how a scholar should write about Jane Austen and her work without making sweeping generalizations about her life. Just as Engel looks closely at the muff in *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility* and invites her reader to imagine the significance of the muff to the rest of Austen's oeuvre, in this section I examine the theatricals within *Mansfield Park* metonymically. The theatricals are a means to enter the narrative with Austen's own "theatrical narrative strategies" in mind. My discussion of the novel considers how the text embraces the sexual "slippage between illusion and reality." The narrative of *Mansfield Park* behaves like a play in that the audience is allowed to recognize the performance. In fact, in characters such as the Crawfords, readers are encouraged to see the conscious facades that the siblings take time to develop and implement. Particularly in the case of Mary Crawford and Fanny Price, these masks are a means of coping with oscillating sexual feeling in a heteronormative environment. Mary and Fanny are, for the audience, clear embodiments of difference; therefore, within their own theatrical narrative, they struggle with frequent feelings of discomfort. The audience is allowed to see just enough cracks in Mary and Fanny's masks to assure us that we move between illusion and reality. However, in order to begin uncovering what happens back stage (or, under the women's masks), we must look much more closely at those moments when the seam between illusion and reality is most evident: in moments of embodied difference and deeply felt discomfort.

Embodied difference and comfort are common themes in queer theory. The basic conception of comfort in terms of queerness and bodies is that queer bodies cannot feel comfortable in a heteronormative society because they are constantly reminded of their

difference from the heterosexual “norm.” Thus, a body that experiences difference—divergence from the norm—as it walks through life must endure the discomfort of not quite fitting in *and* tend to seek out other bodies of difference so that it might have a better chance at finding comfort. Essentially, bodies of sexual difference or queer bodies gravitate towards one another in order to find a comfort that is nearly impossible to find among normative bodies. This sense of discomfort—of not belonging, particularly in issues of sexual difference and racial difference, brings the body to the forefront of one’s consciousness: “It is,” Sara Ahmed notes, “pain or discomfort that return one’s attention to the surface of the body *as body*” (425). Fanny and Mary embody sexual difference and thus experience discomfort. The two women oscillate between feelings of attraction for men and women. In addition, in the eyes of the other characters, Mary is overly sexual²⁹ and Fanny is not sexual enough.³⁰ While Fanny’s reaction is to fade into the background and hide her difference, Mary’s reaction is to flaunt her difference. These two women follow a narrative trajectory that derives from their initial reactions to difference. Mary is willing to emphasize her difference and actively seeks another queer body in order to experience some comfort. Although Mary never appears to be fully comfortable, she finds a measure of comfort in Fanny’s arguably queer body. However, Fanny, unhappy with her inability to hide her difference, shrinks from Mary’s advances; like Mary, Fanny experiences a measure of comfort in Mary’s presence, but Fanny still shies away from embracing that comfort.

²⁹ She “accept[s] the part [of Amelia] very readily (*MP* 141), and she and Henry come to Mansfield “late and dark and dirty as it was” to discuss the play (*MP* 146).

³⁰ When he notices how uncomfortable Fanny is, Edmund believes she is too modest. He chastises, “If you cannot bear an uncle’s admiration, what is to become of you? You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at.—You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman” (202). And he tells her, “you seemed almost as fearful of notice and praise as other women were of neglect” (203).

It is important to recognize Fanny's extreme discomfort, even with another body of difference (Mary). As Sara Ahmed argues in her article on "Queer Feelings," "whilst being queer may feel uncomfortable within heterosexual space, it does not then follow that queers always feel comfortable in queer spaces" (427). Ahmed skillfully explains the necessity to be careful when discussing comfort and embodied difference. The temptation is to draw strong boundaries between "different bodies" and "normative bodies," and assume that bodies feel more comfortable with like bodies. As we put this temptation into words, the flawed logic and danger of segregation comes to mind. Thus, as Ahmed points out, we must remember that comfort and discomfort are not entirely based on being around like bodies. Fanny does not feel absolutely comfortable with any other body. In addition, Mary, who has the ability to feel some comfort in both normative space (during her courtship with Edmund) and in non-normative spaces (moments of sexual tension with Fanny), does not experience absolute comfort either. To explain comfort as a theoretical term, Ahmed uses this brilliant analogy, and it is worth quoting here at length:

Thinking about comfort is hence always a useful starting place for thinking. So let's think about how it feels to be comfortable. Say you are sinking into a comfortable chair...comfort is about the fit between body and object: my comfortable chair may be awkward for you, with your differently shaped body. Comfort is about an encounter between more than one body, which is the promise of a "sinking" feeling...To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view. The disappearance of the surface

is instructive: in feeling comfort, bodies extend into spaces, and spaces extend into bodies. The sinking feeling involves a seamless space, or a space where you can't see the 'stitches' between bodies. (425)

With this metaphor of the comfy chair, Ahmed recognizes that feelings of comfort are closely connected to feelings of belonging and ease. The search for comfort is also the search for a lack of struggle. While Ahmed's description of comfort is nearly impossible for most people to achieve, her article makes clear that it is far easier for heteronormative bodies to find their "seamless space." Non-heteronormative bodies are likely to struggle as they try to fit themselves into heteronormative "chairs," and it is common for them to experience discomfort and subsequently to be hyper aware of their bodies. In addition, when Ahmed argues that "normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it" (423), the implication is that those who cannot inhabit normativity feel discomfort *and* we could even further argue that those who more *comfortably* inhabit normativity experience *discomfort* when forced to face a non-normative body within a normative space. In other words, to elaborate on Ahmed's metaphor, when you sit in my comfortable chair it may be uncomfortable for you because it does not fit your body; we could further argue that it is uncomfortable for me to witness you sitting in my chair where my body is comfortable and therefore feels a sense of belonging. I may feel as if you are displacing me from my comfortable space or otherwise changing that space to better fit your body.

Heather Love suggests that this lack of "seamless space" for queer bodies is politically productive. In *Feeling Backward*, Heather Love looks at late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century texts that grapple with backward feelings such as "nostalgia, regret, shame, despair...[feelings] *tied to the experience of social exclusion*"

(Introduction). Love knits together politics and feeling, pointing out that “the saturation of experience with ideology is particularly important to queer critics because homophobia and heterosexism inflect everyday life in ways that can be difficult to name”

(Introduction). Her analysis uses novels with queer heroes and heroines that feel extreme discomfort in a heteronormative society to demonstrate how that discomfort, or “bad feelings,” “has been a crucial element of modern queer experience” and that it can function as a catalyst for political activism (Epilogue). Love’s work is especially significant in terms of methodology because it demonstrates the importance of examining queer feelings in historical literature. She argues, “earlier forms of feeling, imagination, and community may offer crucial resources in the present. Attending to the specific histories of homophobic exclusion and violence—as well as their effects—can help us see structures of inequality in the present” (Introduction). Just as Love’s exploration of discomfort in historical literature allows for the creation of new perspectives on twenty-first-century queer theory, so my chapter considers the discomfort that eighteenth-century characters experience in order to expand our definitions of twenty-first century female bisexuality. A definition that acknowledges the term’s problems while embracing its usefulness. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny and Mary represent bisexual feeling—they desire both men and women. As bodies of difference, they will always experience a small level of discomfort in every space they enter, because their sexuality is constantly oscillating. They cannot sink into that familiar, comfortable chair that Ahmed describes because they do not sit long enough in one identity or one sexuality. For Fanny and Mary, discomfort does derive from an embodied sexual difference—but it is not a static difference. Their difference cannot be properly named because it is constantly in motion.

The private theatricals that appear—or rather, are rehearsed but fail to be performed—in *Mansfield Park* invite the reader to search for theatricality throughout the novel. Characters like Henry and Mary are most often considered performers, but even Fanny takes on a character of meekness when it suits her purposes. There is a large subsection of scholarship on *Mansfield Park*—which specifically discusses the private theatricals and the theatricality within the novel—that includes scholars such as Paula Byrne, Penny Gay, Elaine Jordan and Joseph Litvak³¹ have contributed to. Elaine Jordan sees the stage as an instructional space; she classifies Austen’s writing as feminist, pointing out that the theatricals ultimately demonstrate her “concern...with the strength and usefulness of women in changing society” (147). This is why, she argues, Austen uses women like Fanny to teach men like Edmund what it means to be an individual who makes good choices that align with his/her own mind. And in *Mansfield Park* those lessons revolve around the anticipation and rehearsal of *Lovers’ Vows*. Critics often share the idea that the public nature of theatricality allows readers to recognize the private nature of individuality and the self. Joseph Litvak, in his article on “The Infection of Acting” in *Mansfield Park*, argues that the novel explores various facets of the “theatrical self” (20). He sketches out a timeline of the novel that places an extroverted theatrical self in Maria and Julia as the novel opens, a fluid and transitional theatrical self in Mary and Henry at the middle, and an introverted theatrical self in Fanny at the conclusion of the book. For Litvak, the theater in *Mansfield Park* is a space of fluid possibility: “a

³¹ This chapter is interested in how bringing together the genres of drama and the novel can enrich our interpretations of literary works. However, some *Mansfield Park* scholars would prefer that the genres remain separate. Kathleen E. Urda believes that the book “ultimately asserts its own distinct identity” as a novel (283) and that the theatricals in *Mansfield Park* function as a means of emphasizing the novel genre’s ability to produce stronger, more “real” characters than the drama genre. While a discussion of form is certainly important, it seems unproductive to try and determine which genre is at the heart of a book, particularly with a novel like *Mansfield Park* that so thoroughly blends two genres.

fluctuating space in which all positions find their tenuous footing” (5).³² Litvak’s description of how Fanny views the theater conjures up notions of bisexuality and the bisexual gaze—a gaze that is neither masculine nor feminine and allows both object and viewer to experience and explore the fluidity of multiple genders and sexualities. Just as theater is a space of possibility so the bisexual gaze is a space of sexual possibility.

In line with Litvak’s thinking, Fanny is not eager to embrace the “fluctuating space” that is the theater nor is she open to consciously considering her desire for Mary. Her discomfort becomes evident when the group demands that she participate in the theatricals. Her refusal comes from a place of uncertainty and fear. Her desire to be entertained clashes with what she believes her views *should* be: “For [Fanny’s] own gratification she could have wished that something might be acted, for she had never seen even half a play, but every thing of higher consequence was against it” (*MP* 135). In addition, once she is alone she reads *Lover’s Vows*: “The first use she made of her solitude was to take up the volume which had been left on the table...*Her curiosity was all awake, and she ran through it with an eagerness* which was suspended only by intervals of astonishment” (140, my emphasis). Fanny’s instinctual desire is pleasure. She longs to see a play—to be entertained and to gaze upon bodies in motion. She greedily consumes *Lover’s Vows* when she is alone, and she stops reading only to allow herself to feel shocked over the roles of Agatha and Amelia that are “unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty” (141). Fanny does not express a moral disapproval out loud. She recognizes that acting *Lover’s Vows* is improper according to the rules of society. But, as

³² Anna Lott agrees with both Jordan and Litvak: she recognizes Fanny’s “role as teacher” while considering how that role can be used for good by Fanny and for ill by Mary (277-279). Acting, according to Lott, “is both an instrument of disruption and a means to restore order” depending upon the motives for which and situation in which it is used. Litvak, Jordan, and a number of other critics also recognize this dual nature of theatricality and performance.

Ruth Bernard Yeazell suggests, Fanny's modesty is fragile and dependent upon the action of others. She expects Edmund to "have [Julia and Maria] roused as soon as possible by [his] remonstrance" (*MP* 141) of the play. Rather than speak up, she waits for Edmund to rescue her cousins and herself from their desire for pleasure. Her embodied difference is largely rooted in her extreme fear of self-indulgence; Fanny is afraid of her own desire.

Yeazell puts pressure on the troupes of modesty and morality in Austen's novels. Yeazell argues that "*Mansfield Park* does not always distinguish a modest consciousness from a conscious sense of loathing toward the body" (163), and explores the ways in which Fanny Price's "modesty"—often read as "a given" (145)—is a complex, conscious performance that propels the narration forward and emphasizes the theatrical elements of the novel. For Yeazell, Fanny's modesty is often rescued by the narration; when she considers agreeing to act as a stand-in on *Mansfield Park*'s makeshift stage and when she is considering accepting Henry: "Only by abruptly interposing a new action does Austen assure that her heroine's modesty will not yield to this conclusion" (155). In Yeazell's reading, it is the return of Sir Thomas that keeps Fanny from submitting to peer pressure, and it is Henry's inability to resist Maria that stops Fanny from accepting him. Fanny's modesty is her most attractive quality, but it is only legitimated because circumstances prevent it from being tarnished. Thus, Fanny's modesty becomes less of a moral virtue and more of a performance aided by the narration. Yeazell's reading enables us to question how the novel might redefine or at least play with the definition of morality. In *Mansfield Park*, morality is based upon the perception of others: if the other characters believe Fanny is moral because of her modesty, then she is moral (despite the

questionable nature of that modesty). Morality becomes malleable via theatrical narration and performance.

Although she allows herself a moment of pleasure—intermixed with the obligatory recognition of impropriety—while she is alone, having all eyes upon her forces Fanny to fully suppress that pleasure and gives her an anxiety attack. When she continues to refuse to act and Tom begins badgering her in earnest, she feels “shocked to find herself at that moment the only speaker in the room, and to feel that almost every eye was upon her” (149). As others take Tom’s side, Fanny continues to decline, but has little ability to stop her fragile modesty from bending: “‘You must excuse me, indeed you must excuse me,’ cried Fanny, growing more and more red from excessive agitation, and looking distressfully at Edmund” (150). In this moment, Fanny turns to Edmund to rescue her from her inability to take a firm stance. When she is under the scrutiny of “every eye” in the room, Fanny feels her difference keenly. She is neither willing to speak condemnation against acting nor is she able to participate in it. Ahmed reminds us that “pain or discomfort...return one’s attention to the surface of the body *as body*” (425). As Fanny experiences the discomfort that results from her difference, she also has a heightened awareness of her body. The more aware of her body she becomes, the more she must face the instinctual feelings that result in her difference. Thus, the close attention paid to Fanny throws her into a cycle of body awareness and discomfort. In this same scene, Tom calls Fanny a “creepmouse” (149), perhaps identifying her more accurately than any other character, for Fanny desires to be unnoticed by all. Her creep-mousiness is a means by which she copes with embodied difference. When she is noticed, her difference is seen by all and felt keenly by herself and she thus becomes more aware

of her body; her discomfort becomes evident. By staying silent and still, she can hide her discomfort—the indication of her difference.

Fanny often uses Edmund as a means to hide her difference and discomfort. She looks to him to tell her what to think and how to behave. We could argue that Fanny has the qualities of self-inflicted puppetry; she often (though not always) allows herself to parrot Edmund's values. Like Fanny, Mary uses her own close male relative, her brother Henry, as a substitute or even surrogate for her desire; although she is less afraid of her desire than Fanny, Mary spends the majority of the novel trying to actively force her body to conform to a narrative of heteronormativity. Mary and Fanny attempt to hide their own embodied difference and discomfort by using the bodies of Edmund and Henry as conduits for expressing their mutual female desire. The women step into multiple roles and even use props to express fluctuating sexual feelings. They perform a likeness to their male relatives as they move between maneuvering the heterosexual codes of courtship, experiencing homoerotic relationships, and following the fluidity that guides their bodies. In “‘Where She Could Not Follow:’ The Lesbian Subplot in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*,” Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka emphasizes two key points in the novel: first, Mentxaka examines the scene in which Fanny listens to Mary play the harp after getting stuck at the parsonage during a rain storm and imagines herself to be in the same seat as Edmund (7); second, Mentxaka points out a scene in the novel where Mary’s body is compared to Henry’s and they are concluded to be quite similar (7). Although Mentxaka looks at these scenes in two separate sections of her article, she does recognize the links between Fanny’s similarity to Edmund and Mary’s similarity to Henry: “The suggestions of Mary as Henry’s duplicate is as delightfully subversive as that of Fanny substituting

Edmund” (7). Mentxaka’s line of argument follows the book’s heterosexual conclusion, so her lesbian subplot must be a temporary flirtation that is never realized. In the following subsection, I will push this small element of Mentxaka’s fascinating article to a further level of scrutiny by examining the theatrical elements present in Mary’s and Fanny’s relationship. This theatricality enables them to enact a fluid sexual desire through the conduits of props and other people.

Mansfield Park, Theatricality, and the Presence of Sexuality

Their complex desire for one another takes shape when Mary enlists Fanny as a scene partner to rehearse a particularly controversial part of Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Lover’s Vows*. In the play’s scene, Amelia openly tells Anhalt—a clergyman and her tutor—that she loves him and would like to marry him. Mary, who plays the role of Amelia, admits to Fanny, “I do not think I could go through it with *him* [Edmund, who plays the role of Anhalt], till I have hardened myself a little, for really there *is* a speech or two...look at *that* speech, and *that*, and *that*” (171). Austen’s italics emphasize a mystery around this scene. There are no proper or specific nouns, but the word “that” in italics places a focus on what Austen might be referring to. A reader familiar with the play would understand her references without her having to detail the plot in her own novel, while a reader unfamiliar with Inchbald’s play might go and read it for herself—without Austen overtly telling her to do so. The reader of *Mansfield Park* either already knows or eventually discovers that Mary is talking about the same forward dialogue that Inchbald herself considers scandalous.

The scheme of performing a private theatrical seems inevitable for the young people at Mansfield Park. With Sir Thomas and his oppressive authoritative presence gone, the Crawfords and Bertrams—along with Yates and Rushworth—are free to make space for their penchant toward performance. But long before private theatricals are mentioned, the narrator establishes a tone of theatricality and spectacle among the novel's main characters. When Fanny first comes to Mansfield Park, the Bertram family scrutinizes her body and movements, and she feels their attentions quite deeply: "She was disheartened by Lady Bertram's silence, awed by Sir Thomas's grave looks, and quite overcome by Mrs. Norris's admonitions. Her elder cousins mortified her by reflections on her size, and abashed her by noticing her shyness" (14). Even the Bertrams' servants "wondered at her ignorance, and...sneered at her clothes" (15). Fanny's entrance into the Bertram household reads like an entrance onto a stage with a difficult audience. She is a spectacle that provides entertainment for her cousins and a source of haughty criticism for her Aunt and the household servants. Maria and Julia are equally scrutinized, but they fair better in the limelight: "The Miss Bertrams were now fully established among the belles of the neighbourhood; and as they joined to beauty and brilliant acquirements, a manner naturally easy, and carefully formed to general civility and obligingness, they possessed its favour as well as its admiration. Their vanity was in such good order, that they seemed to be quite free from it" (35). Maria and Julia thrive on attention. They perform politeness and gentility with an effortlessness that makes said performance all the more appealing. The focus on the Miss Bertrams' bodies reflects their own focus on the body of their cousin, Fanny. Just as they embarrass her by talking about her body ("her size"), Maria and Julia find delight in the neighborhood's discussion of their bodies.

These discussions emphasize the characters' physicality and asks readers to imagine what the bodies of the Bertram sisters and Fanny might look like. The narrative invites a theatrical envisioning of its characters' bodies.

Henry and Mary Crawford's entrance into the novel is accompanied by the other young characters' coming-of-age and the sexuality their bodies are beginning to exude. When they arrive, Mrs. Grant suggests that Henry might marry Julia, and Mary's response is laughter. She says of her brother, "He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined" (44). True to Mary's assessment of his character, upon meeting the Miss Bertrams, Henry "began with no object but of making them like him. He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself great latitude on such points" (45). Henry happily makes a game out of flirting with Julia and Maria. Before *Lover's Vows* is even thought of, the narrative establishes sexuality as performance and play. In this way, the book pushes eroticisms and theatricality out in force. Jill Heydt-Stevenson notes that even though scholarship has focused mainly on the morality of *Mansfield Park*, the book "contains as much ribaldry as it does piety, and the morality that exists there is lodged in and complicit with the novel's unruly witticisms" (*Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions* 138). She argues that "much of *Mansfield Park's* content is indisputably risqué" (137), including the name of its heroine: "[Fanny Price's] very name signifies prostitution: the price of the body" (144). Heydt-Stevenson suggests that Austen meant for sexuality to be a part of both the novel's humorous moments and its general plot. By the time the notion of private theatricals enters the narrative, the display of eroticism—its connection to performance and theatricality—have already been firmly established as themes of the

novel. In addition, the narrative embeds this theatricality and eroticism in a domestic space. The scrutinizing of Fanny's and the Miss Bertram's bodies and Henry Crawford's rakish games all take place within either Mrs. Grant's or the Bertram's homes. Thus, the choice to perform *Lover's Vows*, a particularly risqué drama adapted from an even more shocking original, as a private theatrical serves to concretize the already laid foundation of eroticism and theatricality within a domestic space.

When Inchbald translated August Von Kotzebue's German play, *Child of Love* (1791), she was exceedingly conscious of how scandalous the play could be considered if it were translated word-for-word into English. Amelia's character in particular is "indelicately blunt" (Inchbald "Preface"); in her Preface to her version of the play, *Lovers' Vows*, Inchbald writes, "the forward and unequivocal manner in which she announces her affection to her love, in the original, would have been *revolting* to an English audience." Inchbald's solution is to "attach the attention and sympathy of the audience by whimsical insinuations, rather than coarse abruptness" (Preface). While Amelia's speeches are still quite forward for late eighteenth-century culture, particularly because she tells Anhalt she loves him before he says anything about it, Inchbald adjusts the character in such a way that she is forward without seeming vulgar to an English audience. When she first declares her love, Amelia appears slightly shy but desires to speak her mind—as a masculine lover might. Anhalt, however, plays the coy, feminine beloved. The scene is worth quoting at length so that the scope of the shifting gender roles can be grasped:

AMELIA. I will not marry.

ANHALT. You mean to say, you will not fall in love.

AMELIA. On no! [ashamed] I am in love.

ANHALT. Are in love! [starting] And with the Count?

AMELIA. I wish I was.

ANHALT. Why so?

AMELIA. Because *he* would, perhaps, love me again.

ANHALT [warmly]. Who is there that would not?

AMELIA. Would you?

ANHALT. I—I—me—I—I am out of the question.

AMELIA. No; you are the very person to whom I have put the question.

ANHALT. What do you mean?

AMELIA. I am glad you don't understand me. I was afraid I had spoken too plain [in confusion]. (Act III, scene ii)

In this scene, Amelia takes on the masculine role of pursuer. Although their conversation is focused on love, Anhalt has been charged by Amelia's father to discover if she loves her suitor, the Count. It is Anhalt she truly loves, and she takes the opportunity of the conversation topic to declare that love. Inchbald writes her as "ashamed" when she says that she is in love, but when Amelia speaks more openly and says "you," to Anhalt, she is neither ashamed nor shy. Meanwhile, Anhalt takes on the stereotypically feminine role of coy flirt. He asks all the questions, forcing Amelia to make statements. Before Amelia's direct "you," he asks "who?" And once she is more open about her feelings, he balks and says unconvincingly, "What do you mean?" Both Amelia and the audience are aware that Anhalt knows exactly what she means. But, as the coy beloved, he shies away from direct language and forces his lover to declare her

feelings again and again. As Amelia says she “was afraid [she] had spoken too plain,” she openly admits her attempts to take on the stereotypically masculine role of pursuer.

Although she knows that her meaning was clear, her confusion is sincere. After all, why should she not take the initiative if Anhalt remains determinedly coy? But as she says that line, she also understands that the exchange did not follow the gendered codes of courtship, and in the dialogue following the quoted scene above she recoils back into a submissive feminine subject position. In this initial lover’s scene shared between Amelia and Anhalt, Amelia is an example of a woman performing a masculine subject position in order to satisfy her desire. By highlighting Amelia’s gender bending performance through Mary Crawford’s feigned worry about acting the part of Amelia, Austen encourages readers to align Amelia’s character with Mary’s. What we discover is that Mary uses similar techniques in her own pursuit of both Fanny *and* Edmund; she performs a masculine subject position in order to satisfy her desire for both sexes. However, Austen—using her theatrical narrative strategies—gives Mary more to work with. Austen’s narrative is slightly more complex than Inchbald’s play because the genre’s prose allows it to be so. As a result, Mary’s performance is a great deal more fluid than Amelia’s. By first reading Amelia’s character, then reading Mary’s, we get the strong sense of how much more flexible and daring Mary is, particularly in her scenes with Fanny.

Although Fanny refuses to participate in the acting, Mary convinces her to read as Anhalt by comparing Fanny to Edmund. She tells her, “You must rehearse it with me, that I may fancy *you* him, and get on by degrees. You *have* a look of *his* sometimes” (171). Mary compares Fanny to Edmund and implies that they are so similar that Mary could

imagine Fanny to be Edmund. More important, Mary *wants* to imagine Fanny as Edmund. This scene begins to reveal the complex erotic desire present between the two women. Although Mary desires Edmund, she also desires Fanny. Although Fanny is magnetically drawn to Mary, she is also in love with Edmund. It is tempting to label this a lesbian desire that cannot be realized unless it is conducted through a male love object. However, Austen is very clear that the passion both women feel for Edmund is sincere. In a moment such as this scene—in which Mary and Fanny share homoerotic pleasure—the presence of desire for a male body must be remembered. Rather than arguing that this scene contains homoerotic tension in the midst of a story about heterosexual courtship, a much clearer explanation would be to recognize that the bisexual gaze is present throughout the entirety of the novel. The bisexual gaze between the bodies of Mary and Fanny enables us to read them as bodies on stage, acting and reacting to each other's small movements. Edmund's body—at first just a thought specter and then a material reality—is a conduit for the women's desire. Sexual energy flows between Mary and Fanny through a male-body-as-prop. The result is a sexuality much more complex than the dichotomous hetero or homo.

The layer of performance further complicates the bisexual desire between Mary and Fanny. In this rehearsal scene, neither woman is playing herself. Mary is taking on the part of a forward, almost aggressively sexual female pursuer, Amelia; Fanny takes on the part of a male clergyman, Anhalt, who is reluctant to declare his feelings but reciprocates nonetheless. Yet when broadly categorizing these roles, they appear quite similar to their inhabitants. The description of Mary and Fanny's rehearsal is remarkably similar to the scene between Amelia and Anhalt, with one noticeable difference: both

participants in this love scene are women. In the rehearsal, both women oscillate between stereotypical masculine and feminine subject positions. Mary's role as Amelia allows her to embody and move between both the masculine and feminine traits of that character. In addition, by seeking Fanny out in her intimate, personal space—the East room, her place of “escape” (170)—and bullying her into the rehearsal of an intimate scene, Mary's behavior mirrors that of a forceful, insistent pursuer, a lover that feels she can invade her query's most private places.

Yet Fanny also practices the embodiment of a masculine subject position. The narrator writes of the rehearsal, “[Mary] began, and Fanny joined in with all the modest feeling which the idea of representing Edmund was so strongly calculated to inspire; but with looks and voice so truly feminine, as to be no very good picture of a man. With such an Anhalt, however, Miss Crawford had courage enough” (172). Fanny's version of performing a masculine subject position involves taking on the characteristics of her cousin, Edmund, who is also a love interest. This passage explores Fanny's complex motivations and needs a little parceling out. Fanny is in love with Edmund but her love is unrequited. One of the ways Fanny feels she can become closer to Edmund is through “representing” or imitating him. So rather than simply desiring to be *with* Edmund, she reveals in the rehearsal scene with Mary her desire to *become* Edmund. I would attribute her dual desire to a subtle bisexual eroticism that has begun to manifest itself in Fanny since Miss Crawford's appearance at Mansfield Park. Unfortunately, unlike Mary, poor Fanny is not a favorite of the narrator. The narrator makes fun of her failed attempts to be Edmund by pointing out in a rather sarcastic tone that Fanny was “so truly feminine” it was impossible for her to be like any man. The narrator appears to see this as a

disadvantage. Fanny wants to take Edmund's place, but she does not have Mary's performative skills so she falls short of her aspirations. Conversely, Mary is able to make do with Fanny's poor performance. And the narrator suggests that Fanny's femininity—"with such an Anhalt"—contributes to Mary's "courage." To put it simply, Mary can fluidly move between the masculine and feminine performances required of Amelia's character *because* Fanny was insufficiently masculine. This is another example of the bisexual gaze at work. These two women attempt to manipulate and perform differing gender subjectivities in order to enact sexual desire. But each word or action from one woman changes the word or action from the next. This exchanged gaze and the manifestation of erotic desire within that gaze is a living entity that shifts and fluctuates in response to the bodies of the gazer and the object.

The Erotic Props of *Mansfield Park*

In June 2011, some of Elaine McGirr's second-year drama students from the Royal Holloway University of London performed several scenes of *Mansfield Park* that McGirr had converted into dramatic dialogue around Chawton House, where visitors can follow the "Jane Austen Trail." Fanny Price (Celine Hawkes) served as the audience's narrator and tour guide as she moved them from "the wilderness to the Great Hall, with additional stops in the courtyard and servants' attic" (78). Appropriately titled *Staging Lovers' Vows*, the promenade performance was chiefly concerned with the portion of the novel in which characters discussed and rehearsed "the play so famously not performed in the novel," Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lover's Vows*; the piece resulted in "making the tensions between private and public, fiction and reality, past and present manifest" (78).

In *Staging Lover's Vows*, the twenty-first century actors play eighteenth-century characters who are themselves interested in acting, thus creating a tight connection between the novel and its contemporary adaptations. McGirr's production reveals the depths of theatricality within *Mansfield Park*. In a discussion of the private theatricals in the novel itself and in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in general, McGirr argues that "the craze for amateur acting was so strong in large part because the young people were not play-acting, but given license to act out their own desire, to be themselves rather than polite young ladies and gents" (82). Similarly, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that, within *Mansfield Park*, "Theater is not the fount of inequity, but a metaphor for the ideology that forces women to mask their true selves" (157). In the case of Fanny and Mary, those moments of acting as Anhalt and Amelia reveal their "true selves"—or, rather, the desires that do not align with the heterosexual norm. The possibility of performing *Lover's Vows* awakens an eroticism between the two women that continues throughout the novel in the form of specific objects that Mary and Fanny handle in each other's presence.

While *Lovers' Vows* certainly invites readers to consider that section of *Mansfield* through a theatrical lens, the novel is full of theatrical moments that do not involve the play. Most evident is the use of objects—or props—to signal a body's desire in parts of the narrative not associated with *Lovers' Vows*. In *The Stage Life of Props*, Andrew Sofer considers "the power of stage objects to take on a life of their own in performance" (2). While Sofer uses plays as case studies for his theories, we can use his conclusions on how to read props to push our own critical reading of a theatrical narrative like *Mansfield Park*. For Sofer, an analysis of props requires the critic to imagine bodies on stage; we

cannot look at an object alone. We must see that object in the context of the actors'—or, in the case of a theatrical narrative, the characters'—bodies and how those bodies “manipulate” that object “in the course of performance” or throughout the narrative (11). He writes, “Props’ most common function is to act as various kinds of *visual shorthand*...[they] easily slide from metonymy to metaphor” (20-21). In considering the significance of a prop in a theatrical narrative, we must take into account three things: 1. How the character(s) physically interact with and manipulate the prop; 2. What the prop signifies about the character(s) who handle it; and 3. What the prop signifies in general within the context of the plot. To illustrate this method of reading props in a theatrical narrative, I turn to two specific examples within *Mansfield Park*: Mary’s harp and Fanny’s necklace. Ultimately, identifying the harp and the necklace as props enables us to visualize the bodies of Mary and Fanny as we might visualize the bodies of actors upon a stage. The physical props are suggestive of their desire; they are signifiers that clue us in to their internal embodied difference and the discomfort that results in.

Mary’s primary prop is her harp, and it is introduced abstractly when she mentions to Edmund that she plays and she is having it sent to Mansfield Park (59). As readers and audience members, we do not actually see or hear the harp until Fanny sees it in Volume Two. Long after Sir Thomas returns and shuts down the private theatricals scheme, Mrs. Norris sends Fanny on another tedious errand. Fanny gets caught in a rainstorm near the Parsonage, and Mary invites her in to wait for the weather to clear. Fanny observes the harp in the room and it becomes a conversation piece for the women; Fanny’s questions about the harp “soon [leads] to her acknowledgment of her wishing very much to hear it, and a confession, which could hardly be believed, of her having

never yet heard it since its being in Mansfield” (211). The prop immediately signifies Fanny’s desire and Mary’s eagerness to embrace that desire. As the scene progresses, we see an embodiment of the bisexual gaze. Mary, as she plays, is “happy to have a new listener, and a listener who seemed so much obliged, so full of wonder at the performance” (211). The two women’s bodies use the harp as a means to express their mutual desire. The prop becomes a conduit for their desire, and they respond to one another’s movements and expressions around the prop.

The harp as musical instrument is sensual in its own right, and as a prop in *Mansfield Park* its titillating nature emphasizes the sexual tension between Mary and Fanny. In 2006, curator Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton assembled an exhibit entitled *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* in the Wrightsman Galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The exhibit featured a “series of dramatic vignettes” where “equal prominence [was] given to the apparel and applied arts” of the eighteenth-century French Nobility. In the Paar Room, Koda and Bolton used the harp as a central figure in a music lesson display. They note that the harp has the “ability to project a player’s coquetry. In the hands of a voluptuary the harp [is] a powerful instrument of seduction” (46). The harp draws attention to a player’s light hands and nimble fingers, and playing form requires one to embrace it with one’s entire body. Thus the listener is invited to gaze at the player’s body as she reaches to pluck the harp’s strings. In addition, “the harp was a sexual stimulant for players as well as spectators. Necessitating an intrusion between the legs, the harp became an effective autoerotic apparatus” (46). In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny’s captive eyes and ears heighten Mary’s onanistic pleasure. The harp serves as love object for Mary’s own autonomous

stimulation; as Mary manipulates the instrument, she gives Fanny the pleasure of hearing the music while also gazing upon the player.

The harp as a prop also signifies the social and culture codes of the heterosexual matrix that form barriers between them. The harp makes both women think of Edmund, since he was the one who had previously most enjoyed Mary's playing. And it is when Mary suggests she play Edmund's favorite that Fanny, who had been attempting to leave, agreed to stay. She "fancied him sitting in that room again and again, perhaps in the very spot where she sat now, listening with constant delight to the favorite air, played, as it appeared to her, with superior tone and expression" (212). The harp is a sign that Fanny desires Edmund even as she expresses desire for Mary. Here, just as in the rehearsal scene, Fanny imagines that she *is* Edmund. The harp as a prop is used to signal the space between homoerotic and heterosexual desire. As Mary's fingers pluck the strings, as her arms move back and forth, the motion and the steady rhythm of the music become signifiers of the fluid sexual feeling present in that space. From this point until Mary is officially rejected by Edmund, the two women enjoy "an intimacy" which Austen's narrator says is "something new" for Mary and a "kind of fascination" for Fanny (212). The "happiness" Mary feels and the "wonder" Fanny experiences are evidence of a brief moment where both women are comfortable. Their embodied difference—their fluid sexual desire—finds a place to sink in and rest for a short time. Although they eventually separate, the "intimacy" they share is a direct result of their bodies recognizing each other as non-normative. Neither can maintain this feeling of comfort, because the narrative does not allow them to explore it further. In addition, comfort found with another woman and not a man is not something one seeks when one's purpose is to secure a husband.

Thus, the very nature of this instinctual comfort for both Mary and Fanny becomes socially uncomfortable, because it is not meant to be in their own narrative trajectories of desire. The push and pull of erotic desire that the harp represents transforms into an oscillation between the comfort and discomfort Mary and Fanny feel in each other's presence.

The necklace is another prop shared by Fanny and Mary, and it is heavily attached to the cross, which is Fanny's prop. In an attempt to figure out what to wear to the ball Sir Thomas throws in honor of her and William, Fanny "determine[s] to seek the counsel of the more enlightened"—Mrs. Grant and Mary (262). Mary is certainly the most fashionable woman in Fanny's immediate sphere—one could not imagine fashion advice from Lady Bertram or Mrs. Norris would be very helpful—but there is another layer of performance that needs to be acknowledged. That Mary knows what to wear to a social event is akin to the fact that Mary knows how to adorn her female body in the most socially advantageous way. Fanny seeks Mary out because she needs advice on her social performance. They have a kind of civil argument about a chain. Mary would like Fanny to choose one to keep for William's cross, but Fanny believes this is too generous of a gift to accept. There is also a clear desire on Fanny's part to avoid unnecessary and unwanted obligation. Just as Mary won the argument over Fanny staying at the parsonage to hear more of the harp, "Fanny found herself obliged to yield that she might not be accused of pride or indifference, or some other littleness" and she "give[s] her consent" with "modest reluctance" (264). This is another example of what Yeazell identifies as Fanny's performance of modesty. The narrator writes that she "[finds] herself obliged" rather than

simply “feeling obliged.” Fanny is consistently caught off guard by her own feelings, and her response is to perform a modesty that she can barely maintain.

The process of selecting a necklace highlights the particularity of the chain Fanny ultimately chooses. If this prop were to appear in a script, it would be described as “of gold prettily worked,” long, not too extravagant and not too plain, clearly out of Fanny’s reach financially and just heavy enough to be slightly awkward when placed around her neck (264). The chain signifies all that Fanny lacks and Mary has: beauty, balance, money, and breeding. The fact that Mary handles this necklace most—it is the one Mary “more frequently placed before [Fanny’s] eyes than the rest” (264)—is juxtaposed alongside the image of Fanny with the chain around her neck. It is a kind of shared prop that signifies for Fanny the affection of a friend, for Mary the affection of Henry for Fanny, and for both women a mutual unnamed desire for one another (265). Once again the prop that the two women linger over is one that signals multiple layers of desire. Like the motion of Mary’s arms as she plays the harp, the necklace is circular. The line the gold chain makes when it is laid out is malleable when the piece is taken up and handled. Thus, like the harp, the necklace conveys fluidity and motion. Its intimate contact with both Mary’s body and Fanny’s body—Mary had worn it a few times already before giving it to Fanny—is indicative of the tantalizing sexual nature of this particular prop. It is an object meant to ornament the body and to call attention to the woman’s neck and chest.³³ Like Mary’s harp, Fanny’s chain is meant to be both seen and touched. Marcia Pointon argues that, for jewelry, there is a “paramount importance of physical engagement with the object.” In her study of jewelry’s social function, particularly among women, she notes that “touch and look are required simultaneously to deliver the pleasure

³³ Marcia Pointon refers to the bosom as “a display case” for jewelry (“Valuing the Visual” 15).

of the moment” (“Women and Their Jewels” 23). As Mary and Fanny physically interact with the necklace, they are able to experience a shared pleasure. This prop, passed between Mary and Fanny, is a signal of the erotic bisexual gaze and the sexual desire that passes unspoken and unrealized between the two women.

Once more Mary and Fanny find themselves in a space that causes them both comfort and discomfort. Fanny feels initial fear, and then allows herself to briefly settle into comfort. Unlike the harp, an object that can give Fanny pleasure while she observes from a short distance, the necklace necessitates the touch of both women. Fanny “start[s] back at first with a look of horror at” Mary’s offer to give her a necklace. While Fanny’s reaction is certainly an indication of her desire to not be in Mary’s debt, it is *also* an indication of her complex feelings of comfort and discomfort. Fanny wants a necklace but does not want a necklace from Mary, because such a chain would have touched Mary’s skin. Unlike their interaction over the harp, where Fanny was allowed to be passive and accept pleasure, she must actively choose a chain that satisfies her desires. While Mary makes this slightly easier by drawing Fanny’s attention to a specific necklace, Fanny must still be a participant in this metaphorical love scene by accepting Mary’s gift and allowing Mary to place the necklace around Fanny’s neck. Before she can recoil from fear, Fanny is moved to an uncharacteristically open expression of emotion: “‘When I wear this necklace I shall always think of you,’ said she [to Mary], ‘and *feel* how very kind you were’” (265, my emphasis). The sensation of the chain brings heightened awareness to her body. Fanny feels Mary’s kindness in both an emotional and physical sense, and allows herself to sink into the comfort of sharing this moment with another body that experiences difference. Mary shocks the scene back into the

heteronormative world by bringing up Henry's feelings for Fanny and thus opens the door for discomfort to come raging back into the briefly comfortable space. The heightened awareness of their bodies that the chain caused makes Mary and Fanny sensitive to the feelings of discomfort that comes from embodying difference in a heteronormative culture. Once Mary mentions Henry, the fragile comfort of the non-normative interaction is broken and leaves her and Fanny once again in a state of discomfort.

Mary and Fanny oscillate between moments of brief comfort and moments of deep discomfort. Because she is our narrator's focus, we are particularly privy to the depths of Fanny's discomfort in her interactions with Mary. When she allows herself to figuratively embrace another woman that embodies difference, Fanny experiences the comfort that Sara Ahmed reminds us can come from sharing embodied difference. However, these moments are fleeting because the world Austen's narrator creates provides no space for lasting non-normative relationships. Mary and Fanny must always feel discomfort within the novel version of *Mansfield Park*, because the narrative has established that heterosexual trajectories of desire are the only ones that can end a story. Also, their oscillating, unnamable desire prevents them from "sinking in" and feeling comfortable in any space. To see more space for the exploration of embodied difference between Mary and Fanny requires a retelling of the story. This chapter now turns to Patricia Rozema's version of *Mansfield Park* to consider such a retelling.

IV. Rozema's *Mansfield Park*

In her controversial cinematic adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, Patricia Rozema emphasizes the novel's more dramatic scenes and uses elements of Austen's letters and juvenilia to change Fanny's character. Rozema, who both wrote the screenplay for the film and directed it, gives audiences a Fanny Price that is bold and witty—much like Austen herself. Some critics have argued that Rozema's interpretation of the novel and of Fanny's character allows audiences to better understand a feminist side of Austen's writing and that Rozema effectively translates the significance of eighteenth-century political concerns in the novel by bringing twenty-first century political viewpoints into the adaptation. Although David Monaghan does not necessarily advocate for or against the adaptation, he does point out that Rozema appears “determin[ed] to demonstrate Austen's contemporary credentials” (113). And he accurately assesses that a measure of the film's success should involve “the extent to which Rozema can make a plot and a conclusion lifted fairly directly from the novel function as vehicles for the expression of a world view quite alien in some important respects to Austen's” (114). Monaghan identifies what critics often argue is the best quality of the adaptation: its ability to make Austen relevant to a wider range of contemporary art lovers. For art is what celebratory reviews call this film; Rozema, they argue, did not intend to take the novel and make an exact copy of it in the genre of cinema. Rather, she uses the framework of Austen's *Mansfield Park* as a foundation then reimagines the story with contemporary ideas to create an original piece of artistic expression that admires and pays tribute to Austen even while slightly revising her. To the critics frustrated by Rozema's methodology, Alistair

Duckworth insightfully remarks, “nothing is less edifying—or begs more questions—than a criticism that faults a film for not being ‘true’ to the novel” (571).

While some scholars celebrate Rozema skillfully bringing together the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries and some critics such as Sue Parrill surprisingly wonder if “perhaps the reinterpretation was not radical enough” (116), no small number of Janeites were up in arms over the sexier and darker elements added to the film. Desson Howe gripes that Rozema “messes around” unnecessarily with Austen’s brilliance. Howe also calls Fanny’s addressing the camera a “self-conscious MTV moment of intimacy.” Jonathan Romney, called the adaptation “at once gauche and presumptuous,” arguing that “All Rozema does is elide the book’s difficulties by painting over them with unsubtle glamour.” Both critics cringe at the sexually tense scene between Mary and Fanny in Mary’s bedroom. My intention in this section is not to label Rozema’s adaptation “good” or “poor”; rather, this section will use the twenty-first-century text as a lens through which we can ‘re-vision’ Mary and Fanny’s story. As with Lady Gaga and Charlotte Charke’s *Narrative*, Rozema’s twenty-first-century queer perspective on Austen’s eighteenth-century text, reveals new trajectories of desire.

Gilli Bush-Bailey writes of dramatic reenactment: “*contemporary performances revive past performances while past performances are manifest in contemporary ones*” (293). I would argue that contemporary adaptations of *Mansfield Park* “revive” the original they are based on and that Austen’s novel is “manifest” in Rozema’s film even if the film is not an exact copy of the novel. In their exploration of accuracy versus affect in costume drama, Elise Wortel and Anneke Smelik use Deleuze and Guattari’s process of becoming to argue that “postmodern costume films transpose chronological

representations of the past into nonlinear, or rhizomatic, textures of time” (185). The critics that argue vehemently against the freedoms that a film like Rozema’s *Mansfield Park* takes are limiting their viewpoints to “the restrictive binary oppositions of past versus present or history versus memory” (186). Rather than look at how well a film is able to mimic history—or a novel, in the case of this chapter—Wortel and Smelik would have scholars consider how the film is a unique performance of history that uses often anachronistic colors, music, or clothing to create affect. A strong historical film and, I would argue, a strong novel adaptation “unravel the past through the creation of lived sensations in the present” (199); they make history “tangible in an experiential performance of memory...[where] the audience knows that the cinematic representation of history is really a playful and decidedly constructed performance” (200). If we approach Rozema’s *Mansfield Park* with the understanding that its purposeful theatricality creates the “textures of time” Wortel and Smelik teach us to value, then we can access the multiplicities of cultural memory that are represented in the film. Looking at the novel through the film reveals the possibilities of a complex female eroticism and the bisexual gaze present in and among Fanny and Mary’s characters. Rozema uses her film to focus on the less visible themes of Austen’s novel. The slave trade, the sexual tension between the young characters, and the lecherous tendencies of patriarchs (Sir Thomas and Mr. Price) are all present in the novel, but Rozema emphasizes those elements and subsequently makes them visible and obvious. This is perhaps why some academic scholars and pop culture critics disliked the film. They viewed it as an adaptation that lacked the subtlety and subtext of Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. But they are mistaken to think of Rozema’s film as an attempt at an exact representation of the novel;

as Claudia Johnson notes in her introduction to the published screenplay of Rozema's movie, the film is interested "in engaging creatively with that novel in order to explore how and what Austen teaches us across the span of nearly two centuries" (2). In this section, I look specifically at how Rozema uses her contemporary perspective as a lens through which we see embodied difference, comfort, and discomfort in Austen's story. Rozema makes choices in her representation of sexuality, violence, and Mary and Fanny's characters that emphasize the struggle for bodies that experience difference to also find a place of comfort in a restrictive society.

Rozema's Fanny—played by Frances O'Connor—is much more lively than Austen's novel seems to suggest; most significantly, Rozema has Fanny looking straight into the camera while narrating a bodice-ripper-type story that is part of Austen's *Juvenilia*. Fanny does not appear fragile or sickly, nor does she seem timid or hesitant to speak her mind. On the contrary, she gives her opinion often, laughs loudly as she plays with Edmund (Johnny Lee Miller), and has a clearly voracious appetite for knowledge. Her directness is most evident when she looks into the camera; far from the common interpretation of Fanny as submissive, which might mean she is constantly looking down, Rozema's Fanny embraces the gaze of the viewer. While all these characteristics allow audiences to have a much more sympathetic view of Fanny, looking into the camera also allows us to be co-conspirators. By gazing at us, Fanny appears to be saying that despite the barriers of time, physical distance, and the line between imagination and reality, we are all 'in on the joke.' When Fanny looks into the camera, it is O'Connor's eyes that pulls us out of the world of Austen. Her gaze is a wink to audiences: we all understand that this is just a story and that we are watching it unfold knowing that it is all a

performance. This is especially true when we see O'Connor's eyes open over Edmund's shoulder after they kiss at the end of the film. In this one quick smile, she and the audience share the understanding of inevitability; this is Austen, after all, so of course the heroine gets her man and ends up happy, while the selfish people of the novel are soundly punished through bad marriages and inconvenient domestic situations. The look over Edmund's shoulder also indicates that Fanny has power over the narrative. O'Connor's voiceover tells us the fate of the other characters as the film wraps up, implying that O'Connor's own character, Fanny, has control over the story. Although in the novel Fanny appears to be more spectacle than agent,³⁴ Rozema's adaptation promotes the possibility that Fanny's self-control and meekness are purposeful. Menxtaka argues that in the novel "Fanny proves to be a supreme actress, grabbing the only role available to her—that of subsequent introvert—and, in method acting mode, training herself to become her character. She subtly maneuvers between arrangements, and does it with enough self-awareness and determination to turn herself into the star of the show by the end of the book" (12). Placing Rozema's version of Fanny alongside Mentxaka's reading of Austen's Fanny enables us to further consider Fanny's character in terms of acting and theatricality.

In addition to bringing out the Austen in Fanny, Rozema's adaptation emphasizes Mary Crawford's masculine characteristics. When Mrs. Norris takes 10-year-old Fanny briskly through the rooms of the house, she points out the "billiard room" and says firmly that it is "for the men." When Fanny is older, shortly after the Crawfords come into her

³⁴ This is most evident when Sir Thomas returns from Antigua. He assesses Fanny's appearance and forces readers to realize, through the eyes of a lecherous uncle, that Fanny's body is pleasing (182). Shortly after his father's return, Edmund emphasizes this point by insisting that Fanny "must really begin to harden [her]self to the idea of being worth looking at" (202).

life, the camera shows us Mary in that same room. Mary is playing billiards with Tom, Edmund, and Henry while she smokes a cigar. Though she is not the only woman in the room, she is the only woman holding a stick and playing the man's game. This scene reveals Mary's tendency to move into a masculine subject position just as she does when she plays the role of passionate pursuer to Fanny's coy beloved. While she can never truly be male—nor would I argue that she wants to become male—she is capable of moving with masculine characteristics and using those traits to form her own role—a more complex, not strictly feminine nor strictly hetero role. The image of her standing next to the billiards table, leaning on the stick, as she puffs on her cigar in her gorgeous dress presents her as a figure of multiple genders and multiple sexualities. Her outfit, jewelry, and carefully curled hair are signs of her femininity. The cigar she holds to her mouth is a phallic symbol that indicates a desire for men and explicitly highlights her sexual appeal to men. The stick she grasps is also a phallic symbol, yet she wields this item as a weapon in her billiard game. She is able to display and harness a masculine aggressiveness that places her on the same level as the men around her. In addition, Henry flirts with the Bertram sisters while playing billiards. Rozema draws a parallel to the game of billiards and the process of courtship. In this, Mary's playing billiards at the same time as her brother indicates that she is just as interested in attracting women by performing impressive feats of masculine value and using her 'stick' to prove her worth. Rozema's adaptation reveals the way Mary embodies a multiplicity of gendered subject positions and sexual desires.

Rozema also places both abhorrently violent and socially deviant sexuality in the forefront of the viewer's consciousness, which inevitably colors the entire adaptation

with sexual suggestions. Austen's *Mansfield Park* certainly makes Sir Thomas' business endeavors in Antigua a main part of the background, but the source of his money—or his increasing lack of money—is more of a hidden unpleasantness. A reader can recognize Austen's condemnation of slavery if she is considering more than just the main courtship plot line, and we could argue that Austen purposefully houses political commentary in traditionally domestic literature as a means of speaking her mind in an era where society would not encourage her to do so.³⁵ Rozema's *Mansfield Park* attributes Tom's drunkenness and misery to his guilt over the evils of slavery. One night, after Tom becomes ill, Fanny is caring for him and discovers a sketchbook containing some of his drawings. Rozema has already established Tom as an artist that favors dark and disturbing imagery, and in the notebook scene she reveals the depths of his guilt. Fanny, horrified, flips quickly through sketches that portray horrendous violence done to slaves: beatings, rapes, torture. The final image she lands on is of Sir Thomas forcing a female slave to perform fellatio upon him. Fanny is clearly horrified and in this moment, Sir Thomas discovers what she is looking at and knocks the book out of her hands. In the following scene, he is burning the sketchbook. Although this scene is not in the novel, the shocking depictions of torture and rape force the darker side of embodied difference to the forefront of Fanny's—and through her the viewer's—consciousness. Fanny becomes a witness to the violence that bodies of difference experience. While she struggles with her own difference in her mixture of asexual, homoerotic, and heterosexual feelings, Fanny is physically safe. She experiences emotional and psychological discomfort and

³⁵ Since Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, critics have dedicated a great deal of scholarship to post colonial readings of *Mansfield Park* and the rest of Austen's work. For more on this subject, see Maaja Stewart's *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions: Jane Austen's Novels in Eighteenth-Century Contexts* or *The Post Colonial Jane Austen* edited by You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan.

she is very much aware of her body in moments where she deeply feels her difference, but she is not in physical danger. Tom's drawings force her to confront the violence embodied difference can result in. The slaves in Antigua cannot hide their difference because it is literally on the surface of their bodies, and they become victims of those who would punish skin color. Although Fanny is not nearly as harshly victimized as Sir Thomas' Antiguan slaves, the drawings allow Rozema to encourage audiences to draw parallels between Fanny's situation and slavery. The slaves' horrific treatment and their clear inability to escape it is a highly visible representation of the less visible feelings of entrapment and discomfort that Fanny experiences.

Sexual violence haunts the rest of the film, as well. When, shortly after the sketchbook scene, Fanny discovers Henry and Maria (now Mrs. Rushworth) naked and mid-copulation, the emotion of the scene is charged with something close to horror. Henry and Maria's socially deviant sexuality appears far more horrific when juxtaposed against Sir Thomas' violent and cruel sexuality. Rozema uses these two scenes to shed light upon the unsavory aspects of heterosexual sex. While queer sex scenes are so often used in film to represent social deviance, rebellion, and even—in some cases—evil, Rozema emphasizes the horror and evil of heterosexual sex in the same way. The way she chooses to present Sir Thomas' predatoriness and Maria and Henry's infidelity allows her to even out audiences' prejudicial viewing. The stereotypical deviance of representations of queer sexuality is balanced out by the overt destructiveness of heterosexual sex. In this way, Rozema's adaptation reveals the work Austen's novel does to break down the assumed ideal of marriage and domestic bliss. In the novel, there is no truly happy couple—not even Edmund and Fanny. Austen's narrator "intreat[s] every body to believe

that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire” (484). Upon close inspection, this passage reveals the slipperiness of Austen’s words—her careful manner of telling us that Fanny and Edmund are not necessarily perfect for each other. First, the narrator’s “intreat[ing]” her audience to “believe” that Edmund finally stopped loving Mary sounds more like a plea than a statement of fact. Rather than state that Edmund simply did transfer his affections, she begs her readers to actively participate in the fantasy by choosing to accept that he did. By doing so, the narrator implies that readers must suspend any plausible disbelief of Edmund’s love for Fanny. In her novel, Austen problematizes the evidence for desire and happiness. Unlike *Pride and Prejudice*’s Eliza Bennet and Mr. Darcy, *Mansfield Park*’s Fanny and Edmund’s attraction to each other, particularly on Edmund’s part, is not always clear. Fanny and Edmund’s ending becomes more obvious after a viewing of Rozema’s adaptation. Just as Rozema overtly and dramatically gives dimensions of demonization to heterosexual sex, so Austen raises questions about the eighteenth-century cultural narrative of love and marriage that supposedly leads to eternal happiness. Both texts break down traditional understandings of heterosexual relationships by creating murky representations of heterosexual sex that do not necessarily lead to lifelong contentment. But Rozema’s film makes more obvious Austen’s challenge of marriage as a solution to life’s difficulties. By planting visual evidence of social difference in both heterosexual and queer interactions between bodies, Rozema’s film brings out the uncertainty about marriage and the rejection of embodied difference that are less obvious in Austen’s novel.

Rozema's treatment of queer desire is quite different from her treatment of heterosexual desire; in the adaptation, the relationship between Mary and Fanny is especially full of erotic longing. While the novel makes Mary appear fairly pushy and Fanny fairly timid, the film softens Mary's character and makes Fanny less submissive—so much so that the most sexually charged scene of the film is one of apparent mutual longing between the two women. After Fanny gets caught in a rainstorm near the parsonage and Mary invites her in, the action starts to look like the beginnings of a sex scene between two lovers that have been anticipating the moment for ages. Fanny's white dress is soaking and clinging to her body; as Mary peels the clothes off of Fanny, she stares and comments on the loveliness of Fanny's body. The bodies of the actresses, Frances O'Connor and Embeth Davidtz (who plays Mary) become extremely important in this scene of the adaptation. While Mary and Fanny, the characters, are following the basic plot of the novel, O'Connor and Davidtz exchange significant, sexually charged glances. Davidtz gazes pointedly at O'Connor's breasts, and O'Connor half covers herself. Fanny's face reveals a mixture of shyness and uncertainty, and O'Connor does not give her character any expressions of disgust or anger. While Davidtz looks eagerly and hungrily at the other woman's body, O'Connor's face displays a desire mixed with curiosity. The scene is gentle: Davidtz plays Mary as an experienced lover of women, while O'Connor plays Fanny as a woman experiencing sex with another woman for the first time. This scene appears especially sweet when contrasted with both the sketchbook scene and Fanny's discovery of Maria and Henry. In the heterosexual sex scenes, the actors are surrounded by darkness. The lighting is dim and and music generates feelings of fear and tragedy. Both scenes unfold as Fanny discovers something monstrous and

damaging. In both scenes, she is an outsider looking in on the horror of male/female sex. However, the moment she shares with Mary takes place in a grey-white light that comes through a window into Mary's bedroom. The bed is close by and rather than stumbling into a sexually charged space, Fanny is already an active part of the space. The fluid desire Mary has expressed in the billiard room scene and the aversion to heterosexual sex Fanny later experiences culminates in this moment of pleasure. The sexual energy of the scene not only opens a space for the bisexual gaze to be fully explored between Mary and Fanny but it also invites audience members to participate in the gaze. The scene encourages viewers to admire O'Connor's body just as Davidtz does. The way O'Connor smiles at the camera when she kisses Edmund is a tantalizing look back at the audience that recalls our participation in the scene in Mary's bedroom. Even as Fanny kisses Edmund, O'Connor's gaze implies that she is still drawing audiences into her sexual dance with other women.

Rozema's adaptation, more than a direct one-to-one representation of the novel, embodies Austen's story through the actors, sets, and special effects that the cinematic genre allows. Rozema "has taken real risks and reaped real rewards with her work," argues Claudia Johnson in her introduction to Rozema's screenplay. Rozema "treat[s] [Austen's] novels not as a museum piece or as a sacred text but as a living presence whose power inspires flight" (10). As we have seen, the novel subtly depicts embodied difference and discomfort through Mary's obvious scheming and Fanny's attempts to fade into the background. Mary and Fanny find comfort in each others' difference, and the narrator enables us to better understand their interiority. The film, however, transforms the subtlety of Mary and Fanny's oscillating sexual feelings into a visual

exhibition of bodies desiring other bodies. Comfort and discomfort must be read on Davidtz and O'Connor's faces and in the movements of their bodies as they interact with one another. Rozema pulls Austen's novel from the eighteenth century page and brings it to life through turn of the twentieth century bodies. Her cinematic adaptation of Mary and Fanny's interactions encourages audiences to consider the oscillation and flexibility of both eighteenth-century and contemporary women's sexuality.

V. Conclusion: Flirting with the Boundaries of Time

In *Why Jane Austen*, an exploration of Austen's contemporary celebrity, Rachel Brownstein researches the world's love of all things Austen. From Austen's eighteenth-century literary community through twenty-first-century popular culture, Brownstein attempts to explain the phenomenon of desire surrounding Austen's life and work. While she spends time relishing the loveliness of Austen's words, the brilliance of her plots, and the cultural relevance of her subject matter, Brownstein ultimately argues that "Jane Austen is the focal point of nostalgia" for Heritage England (250-251). And, she asserts, "The claim I make about Jane Austen here is that she is a great writer, delightful to read" (12). The fan culture surrounding Jane Austen's work is undeniably flourishing—particularly in the United States. From the Jane Austen Society of North America to Janine Barchas' incredible digital project *What Jane Saw*, Austen fandom involves more than simply enjoying her novels—it is an experience; readers have opportunities to fully immerse themselves in *both* Jane's life and in her works. This is especially clear in the Live Action Role Playing (LARPing) geared toward Janeites that began in Sweden in 2011—recorded by journalist, Martin Rundkvist—and the general theme of LARPing

Janeites that was portrayed in Jerusha Hess' 2013 film, *Austenland*. Of particular interest to me is Janeites' desire to *embody* all things Austen through their physical senses. Whether through attempting to view the same museum exhibits as Austen or by dressing and acting as one of Austen's characters, Janeites try to place themselves in the late-eighteenth century—so much so that they have scholars like Brownstein asking “Why?” However, because they are not jumping in time machines, what the LARPing Janeites really do is give the eighteenth century physical, three-dimensional existence in the twenty-first century. They use what they can discover through research and combine it with their own imagination of Austen's body and the bodies of her novels' characters. Thus, controversial pieces that invite Austen fans to imagine those bodies differently—like Castle's “Sister-Sister” or Sedgwick's “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl”—disturb Janeites' feelings of comfort. Castle and Sedgwick introduce non-normative trajectories of desire and thus invoke feelings of discomfort among the Austen-lovers who see only normative desire in her and among her characters. But these controversial discussions emphasize Austen's continued relevance to our culture. Research from scholars like Castle and Sedgwick are what informed Rozema's film. Like Jane Austen LARPing, Jane Austen fan fiction, and Barchas' *What Jane Saw*, Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park* pushes the past into the present. Each work that brings Austen's past and our present together will inevitably have a different perspective because they each originate from a different twenty-first century mind engaging with the eighteenth-century. As these varieties of adaptations and reenactments come into contact with each other, they spark the debates about Austen that highlight her complexity. She is consistently relevant to twenty-first-century popular culture *and* twenty-first-century theorists.

This chapter has used *Mansfield Park*—the novel and the film—as case studies of how embodied difference is so prevalent among bodies that project oscillating attractions. Mary and Fanny establish comfort together, and they represent the psychic connection between people who embody difference, particularly those that experience *both* heterosexual and homoerotic attraction simultaneously. Mary and Fanny embody difference separately for the majority of the novel, but when they are together they share the bisexual gaze and the brief comfort of finding another body of difference. Although that comfort is never lasting, those moments enable the two to participate in recalibrating ways of seeing and rethinking ways that bodies see each other. These moments of comfort and discomfort, oscillating attraction, and sexual bodies embedded in the context of Austen’s theatrical narrative style are what Rozema makes visible and evident in her adaptation. By emphasizing the sexual tension between Mary and Fanny, Rozema shows how Austen problematizes the way we see female bodies—in relation to each other and to men—in *Mansfield Park*.

At the end of the novel and at the end of the film, we find an interesting commentary on what types of embodied differences are acceptable in the world of *Mansfield Park*. Mary’s non-conformity to heterosexual and feminine norms results in her expulsion from both Edmund’s heart and the Mansfield property. By being too honest about her practical ways of thinking about Tom’s death, rather than paying it the emotional toll it is due, Mary appears grasping and evil. Rozema’s portrayal of this scene places Mary in a spotlight on a kind of stage. She stands up and faces the rest of the family, who are sitting and looking up at her, and—wearing the same dark dress she wore in the billiard room—she speaks calmly with a slight smile on her face about the strategy

of bringing Henry and Maria back into society, which depends upon her marriage to Edmund who will take Tom's place as heir in the event of Tom's death. Edmund perceives this as coldness, but Davidtz gives Mary a surprised expression; Davidtz's Mary is only being honest and her surprise indicates that this honesty is coming from a sincere place—one that Edmund finds detestably unfeeling. He tells her, "You are... a stranger to me. I do not know you. And, I am sorry to say, have no wish to" (Rozema Screenplay 138). Mary's embodied difference is exposed, and she is cast out. Her harsh honesty has revealed her as a stranger to the family at Mansfield Park that was so ready to embrace her. However, Fanny's most obvious embodied difference—her social and economic value—is easily forgiven when the other characters of *Mansfield Park* learn the importance of morality. Her social position and wealth can change; whereas Mary's lack of morality cannot. I would caution readers to return to Yeazell's compelling arguments while examining the last scenes in *Mansfield Park*. Fanny, whether consciously or unconsciously, is performing a moral superiority throughout the entire novel. Mary, who is constantly performing in order to attract Edmund, loses him because she allows a slight moment of authenticity to show through the cracks in her mask.

Fanny holds true enough to her "moral" image that it does not seem false to Edmund or the other characters, but Rozema brilliantly deconstructs the performance of all the characters in one of the last shots of her film. The camera follows Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, Julia and Susan Price as they all walk toward Tom. At first, we see Mansfield Park in the background, and as the camera pans across the grass, it comes to rest on the ruins of a home very like Mansfield Park. The crumbling brick walls and the men subtly working on a ladder in the background remind us that every part of the

society she portrays is a construction. Even as the Bertram family sits down to tea on simple wooden furniture and O'Connor's voiceover informs the audience of Sir Thomas' new tobacco venture—adding that “it could have all turned out differently...but it didn't” (*MP Film*)—indicates the layers of performance within both the narrative and the cinematography. Rozema, in the timely post modern fashion of 1999, gestures toward the idea that there is no center to Austen's narrative. O'Connor's voice over reminds us that the narrative is unstable and “could have all turned out differently.” The ruins in the background signify the constructed nature of the film itself and that even the portrayal of a narrative full of self-conscious performances and the construction of self-images is itself a construction. Rozema's directorial choices in this scene are a demonstration of what Wortel and Semlik discuss in “Textures of Time”: that well-done costume dramas are “haptic performances of memory” (187) that “unravel the past through the creation of lived sensations in the present” (199). When examined alongside one another, the novel and the film allow us to consider the elements of playful construction that are present in both mediums and give us the opportunity to deconstruct those playful constructions. Particularly when we are reading an eighteenth-century novel from a twenty-first century perspective, we must remember that we will always have a fractured frame of reference. By bringing the past (Austen's novel) into the present (Rozema's adaptation) and destabilizing the boundaries between them, we allow for a fluidity of time that also enables us to embrace fluidity of gender and sexuality.

This chapter has used the bisexual gaze and queer comfort to identify moments of performance and fluid sexuality as they passed near and between Mary Crawford and Fanny Price. Though Austen's novel is far more structured than Charke's *Narrative*, both

share moments of flux in which the viewer becomes the object and the gaze is unstable. Yet, unlike Charke who is able to rest within the instability, Mary's embodied difference is deemed unacceptable by *Mansfield Park's* narrator. We might argue that fluidity is much more acceptable in Charke's *Narrative* than it is in this novel. In Joanna Baillie's play, *Witchcraft*, fluidity is not just sternly asked to leave—as it is in Austen's novel; rather, Baillie's characters stamp out fluidity and difference. In the following chapter, I consider how attempting to resist fluidity results in dangerous material consequences. Much like the slavery vividly depicted in Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, Joanna Baillie's 1836 play, *Witchcraft*, portrays the social and physical realities for bodies of difference. Baillie's text, as a closet drama, is emblematic of the hidden position sexuality would be relegated to in Victorian society. Where Charke's *Narrative* boldly celebrates sexual difference and Austen's *Mansfield* cautiously allows characters to explore sexual difference, Baillie's play punishes sexual difference. My reading of *Witchcraft* reveals the great necessity of putting aside discussions of eighteenth-century sexuality that are filtered through the lens of Victorian culture and taking up the a twenty-first-century perspective that enlightens our understanding of the eighteenth century. Again, I play with boundaries of time in order to deconstruct the boundaries of gender and sexuality as I examine the intersections of bisexuality and witchcraft in Baillie's drama.

Chapter 3

Witch Hunt: Bisexuality, Labels, and the Witch Figure in Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*

I. Introduction

In my Introduction and my discussions on both Charke's *Narrative* and Austen's *Mansfield Park*, I have briefly addressed the issues of language and terminology that plague eighteenth-century sexuality studies. The struggle to find the best words to describe sexual feeling and behavior *along with* the material consequences of affixing those words to bodies is in the forefront of this chapter's argument. The word "lesbian" was not used to describe sexual behavior until the late nineteenth century,³⁶ and even the

³⁶ According to the OED. In her Introduction to *Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader*, Martha Vicinus argues that the term "'lesbian' is used in its modern sense as early as 1736, in a virulent attack on the widowed Duchess of Newburgh." She also argues that "lesbian" should not be limited to the categories of "romantic friendships and butch-femme roles," because that limiting "leave[s] little room for women who might behave differently at different times, or who might belong to both categories...or neither. How are we to define a married woman to falls in love with a woman? Or a lesbian who falls in love with a man?" (4) I propose that this is precisely why "bisexual" is a necessary term; however, Vicinus' main

word sapphist—in a discussion of eighteenth-century literature—would not fully envelope what I want to address in Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft: A Tragedy in Prose, in Five Acts* (1836). Like lesbian, “bisexual” was not used until the late nineteenth century (OED). Since there is no definitive word to describe eighteenth-century women who engage in sexual acts with both (or, rather, all) sexes and genders, I follow the example of scholars like Terry Castle in *Apparitional Lesbian* and Emma Donoghue in *Passions Between Women* and I use the terms lesbianism and Sapphism (and their derivatives) interchangeably in this chapter. However, I recognize that neither of these terms is completely accurate and both could be considered unhelpful, because both words exclusively describe attraction between women and do not encompass female desire for men. The problem with discussing the dangers of labeling and the ineffectiveness of the labels we currently use is that I cannot avoid using the very labels I criticize. We lack the language to discuss sexual feeling and behavior without labels, because society requires labels in order to understand itself. However, my argument is rooted in the material consequences produced by affixing any labels—used properly or improperly—to a physical body. The existence and unfortunate necessity of labels places a linguistic cage around my reading of *Witchcraft*. Recognizing the paradoxical nature of this argument, then, this chapter, like the chapters before it, continues to use the word “fluidity” to describe sexualities or sexual behaviors that encompass homoerotic interaction between bodies of both same and differing sexes. However, these words are place holders for the language that we have not yet produced. They are by no means ideal, but they are also the best descriptors available at this moment in time. Using non-ideal labels to discuss the

argument is similar to mine: our current definitions and methods of applying labels needs to be expanded in eighteenth-century sexuality studies.

material consequences those very labels can produce brings further awareness and space to Baillie's play and eighteenth-century sexuality studies.

Joanna Baillie was born to the Reverend James Baillie and Dorothea Hunter Baillie. Both her parents had a noble Scottish lineage; in fact, James Baillie was a descendant of William Wallace, the great Scottish hero and legend. Baillie later wrote an epic poem about Wallace as part of her collection, *Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters* (1817). Joanna spent her early childhood in the rocky wilds of Scotland, and she became known for "her fearlessness and her love of [outdoor] sports" (Carhart 5). She started writing in boarding school where she and her schoolmates performed several of the first dramas she penned; Baillie "acted also as costume-designer and stage-manager" (Carhart 8). Joanna lived in Scotland until 1783-1784 when her father passed away and she went to London with Agnes, her sister, and her mother to live with her brother, Matthew. She started publishing poems before the age of 30, but her first volume—entitled *Poems* (1790)—did not do well. This is when she emerged herself in writing drama. Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* (1798), initially published anonymously, received enormous success even though the plays had not been performed. The volume includes a philosophical discussion of drama in general and the concept of her particular work: each play being a psychological study of one particular human passion. The public attributed authorship to English poets like Walter Scott and Anne Radcliffe, but Baillie revealed herself on the title page of the third edition in 1800. She subsequently published two more volumes of *Plays on the Passions* (the second volume in 1802 and third volume in 1812) as well as a number of other plays and collections of poems. She also wrote literary criticism and religious criticism, and she assembled a book of poetry entitled *A*

Collection of Poems, chiefly Manuscript and from Living Authors, Edited for the Benefit of a Friend by Joanna Baillie, which included poems from such authors as Scott, William Wordsworth, Felicia Hemans, and Anna Letitia Barbauld. Her position as a giant of the eighteenth-century literary community is clear. Although she does not maintain nearly as much critical acclaim as she did in her own time, she is still a household name for scholars of the eighteenth century.

Since she lived for 88 years, Baillie witnessed the rapidly changing eighteenth century and followed it into the Victorian era. She lived in London as the American colonies began to dissipate and loyalists were coming home. From England, she saw the political upheaval in France, the storming of the Bastille, and the French Revolution. She was also a subject of England during the reign of mad King George and the Napoleonic Wars, and she witnessed the abolishment of Slavery in England. Her life spanned the Enlightenment and the Romantics; she saw the public lose faith in the monarchy and subsequently become buoyed up by Queen Victoria's reign. She began working on *Witchcraft* during a time that was focused on reforming Poor Laws and promoting welfare for the disenfranchised lower classes. She was famous for her charity work, and even though *Witchcraft*'s themes are rather dark, the general message of the play speaks to frustrations with religious legalism and a lack of care for the poor and elderly.

This chapter uses Baillie's *Witchcraft* as a case study for examining the problems of labels and labeling in the late eighteenth century. The play demonstrates how the word "witch"—when affixed to the physical body of a woman—holds dangerous material consequences such as social stigma and death. The witch figure represents the perceived dangers of female sexuality and power; the social and legal systems that were framed to

identify witches among “normal” people reveals what I will call society’s sexual label anxiety—its burning desire to pin down and categorize an individual’s sexuality by applying to a person’s identity a word that can definitively describe a sexual behavior. The word “witch” and the word “bisexual” are labels that imply binaries—good and evil, man and woman, gay and straight. But both words also imply ambiguity and uncertainty. Along with bisexual, witch is an equally slippery term because the label is often applied with little to no tangible “proof”—particularly in the fifteenth through early-eighteenth centuries.

In a recent, comprehensive study of the witch image in Western Europe, Lyndal Roper argues that the definition of “witch” can be vague because the witch figure moves around those implied binaries: “Despite her association with evil, she could be morally ambiguous. She was carnivalesque, but she belonged to elite culture, too...she derived, after all, from the classical figures of antiquity, passed on through the reading of Ovid and Lucian, rather than from popular culture alone. She permitted a host of complex emotional responses: fear, loathing, dread, but also allure and fascination” (19). Roper clarifies that although the witch figure has become a part of the culture of sensation literature, its origins are rooted in the same classical thought that Renaissance art and, later, Enlightenment philosophy embraces. The witch figure has become associated with popular culture and “low art,”³⁷ but Roper explains that the image of the witch was present in high art through mythical figures—both the monstrous, like Medea or Medusa, and the beautiful, like Circe or Calypso. While Roper’s book skillfully illuminates the

³⁷ A number of popular late-twentieth and twenty-first century television shows and movies of varying genres feature witches: *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Charmed*, *Hocus Pocus*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Practical Magic*, *American Horror Story* and *The Witches of East End* are just a few examples.

layers of ambiguity associated with the witch figure, I wish to add to her study by making a firmer connection between witches and sexuality.

In this chapter, I use the female characters of *Witchcraft* to explore the parallels between witchcraft and bisexuality mainly through the concept of the witch hunt. The witch hunt is a process that involves the affixation of labels to physical bodies which results in dangerous material consequences. By looking at the witch hunt and its similarities to society's need to identify sexual feelings and behaviors,³⁸ this chapter engages with the problem of identity labels and proposes that twenty-first-century sexuality labels are less helpful than they are harmful for sexually fluid bodies.

Sexuality labels, such as “bisexual,” and the label of “witch” are all determined by interpreting a body's performance and categorizing its behaviors. Neither “bisexual” nor “witch” are passive by definition. Both labels contain deeply-engrained social stereotypes—ones that connote active bodies. The bisexual body is perceived to be promiscuous—actively searching for sexual encounters with a wide range of other bodies. The witch is perceived to be evil—actively working to control the natural world through supernatural means for personal gain. Witchcraft, like bisexuality, depends on the idea of viewing bodies in performance and the audience's reaction to those bodies. Just as sexuality labels are maintained by the reiteration of the labels that correspond to reiterated performances, so witchcraft is a cyclical performance of behaviors that requires

³⁸ I am certainly not the first scholar to recognize the parallels of the early modern witch hunts to both early modern and contemporary sociological relationships to queer bodies. Julia Garrett does a brilliant reading of *The Witch of Edmonton* in which she uses the play to explore sociological theories of deviance. In her book, *Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature*, Justyna Sempruch reestablishes the witch figure as one that “challenges stigmatized forms of sexuality, race, and ethnicity as linked to the margins of culture and monstrous feminine desire” (1). And Marla Morris actually compares herself to the wicked witch of the west (182) in her personal narrative about struggling with her sexuality in the midst of an unwelcoming society.

an audience to identify it into existence.³⁹ In this chapter, I will use this wider definition of performance and identification in order to explain the dangers of the labels placed upon bodies.

During the Renaissance, when classical literature served as frequent inspiration for writers, pieces of imaginative writing that incorporated references to witchcraft picked up on the same fear that Homer and Seneca expressed through Odysseus and Creon, respectively. In his discussion of the witch burnings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—“the worst of patriarchal catastrophes” (222)—Craig Barnes argues, “these horrendous events were not just patriarchy wallowing in its evil...The scourge that was harrowing Western Christendom was a combination of fantasies of the late Bronze Age carried along and amplified through the centuries until they were actually overpowering the rational mind” (223). Though Barnes does not discuss sexuality, the fantasies he refers to are representations of those sexually charged witches of classical literature, such as Circe or Medea. Female witches in classical literature presented a menacing image through both their power over men and their possible attraction to women. The witches Barnes discusses use their sexual power to coerce both men and women into their beds. Although we cannot automatically assume all witches are also lesbians, neither can we say they are definitively straight. In both the classical period Barnes explores and the eighteenth century, witches represent a fluid sexuality that precludes labels and relies on a variety of attraction rather than a heteronormative

³⁹ See Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*: “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names...the regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative fashion to constitute the material of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (2).

ideology *or* a homonormative social construct.⁴⁰ Through an exploration of *Witchcraft*'s origins and a reading of the characters Violet, Annabella, and the Hags, this chapter explores that in-between sexual space that is neither masculine nor feminine, neither exclusively hetero nor exclusively homo.

II. Joanna Baillie and *The Bride of Lammermoore*

Baillie began working on *Witchcraft* in the late 1820s, but we can see the almost obsessive beginnings of the idea in a letter to Walter Scott in 1819. In the letter, she describes the strong impressions his novel, *The Bride of Lammermoore* (1819), left upon her: "The Bride of Lamer Muir is exceedingly & almost painfully interesting...[the tone] is so melancholy that it left a gloom upon my mind long after I had finished the story" (*Letters* 388). She continues, reflecting on a scene from the novel involving old hags performing witchcraft, that "a tale to be called the Witch" needs to be written, because "these said Hags have created in me a prodigious hankering after it" (389). There is a general consensus among critics that her friendship with Walter Scott and her reaction to his novel was the inspiration for the play. Regina Hewitt goes so far as to call *Witchcraft* the sequel to Scott's *Bride of Lammermoore* (341). However, the temptation to find the origins of the play in the novel alone is negated by the obsessive excitement Baillie expresses in her letter to Scott. While in the letter, she urges Scott to compose a tale specifically about witches (388-389), her "prodigious hankering" connotes a visceral desire to devour the subject herself. She is particularly interested in the scene "between

⁴⁰ Lisa Duggan, the originator of this term, defines homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (179).

the old Hags, as they are preparing to staught [lay out] the corpse, which struck [her] as fearfully natural” (388). Baillie’s obsession with the Hags and their ritual preparation of a dead body to work a spell indicates that the idea was already sprouting up in her imagination. And her interest in the subject of witchcraft is in both the political—“much curious history of human nature & of the time, when so many people were executed for witch craft” (389)—and the body—“a metaphysical view of the subject glimmering through the infernal dialogue of those hags, their own malevolence & envy” (389). As the idea grows and turns into the manuscript of the play, Baillie’s exploration of witchcraft develops into both an examination of bodies interacting in extreme circumstances and a political statement about class, gender, and justice.⁴¹

Although not as popular as *Orra* or *DeMonfort*, *Witchcraft* follows the same tone and pacing as Baillie’s celebrated Gothic dramas. The play begins with a heightened fear that witchcraft is the cause of a young child’s nightly violent episodes. Annabella, a relation of Lady Dungarren (the child’s mother) and a woman who nurses a strong passion for Robert Kennedy, Lord of Dungarren and the child’s elder brother, decides to use this fear to her advantage. She calls on Grizeld Bane—a woman who claims to be in contact with the devil—and (with the help of a bumbling servant) Annabella frames Violet Murrey for the witchcraft that is supposedly causing the child’s illness. In doing so, Annabella hopes that Dungarren will turn his affections away from Violet. To frame her rival, Annabella obtains one of Violet’s gown, cuts a hole in it, returns the gown, and leaves the torn out piece in the child’s bedroom. Lady Dungarren and the other servants are convinced that the child tore off a piece of her tormentor’s gown when the witch

⁴¹ For a further discussion on the hags in Scott’s *Bride of Lammermoore*, see this chapter’s section IV on Grizeld Bane, “‘Are not witches always old and poor?’: The Hags and the Disenfranchised Spinster”

came to the child's room in the night, and because the torn piece of gown matches Violet's garment, she is the chief suspect. What follows is a trial off-stage in which the minister of the parish at Dungarren, Rutherford, testifies that he saw Violet in the company of a man who is supposed to be dead—her father—and several witches calling on the devil in the dark heart of the forest. What he really sees is old Murrey playing a trick on the witches and Violet meeting him in secret because she knew he was really alive. The audience is witness to Violet and old Murrey's secret meeting as well as old Murrey's trick. However, the witches do not realize Murrey is human and neither does Rutherford. These misunderstandings culminate in Violet's sentence: she is condemned to die as a witch. Just before she is burned at the stake, old Murrey shows up and the male servant who helped Annabella confesses to stealing Violet's gown. Violet is proven innocent, and everyone discovers that Annabella is guilty. Annabella has been watching all this from a small apartment, but just as Violet is being set free Annabella is getting into an argument with Grizeld Bane, one of the witches Rutherford saw in the forest. This exchange ends when Grizeld strangles Annabella. Annabella's body is brought out and remains on stage for the rest of the play. The crowd—determined to see an execution—insists that Grizeld is the most evil witch of them all and they are determined to burn her instead of Violet. Conveniently, just as the crowd is shuffling Grizeld toward the pyre, an officer of the King brings an announcement to repeal the law punishing witchcraft: "Henceforth there shall no person be prosecuted at law as a wizard or witch" (412).⁴² Grizeld is revealed to be insane by a long-lost friend of her family, and the play

⁴² In 1736, Parliament passed *An Act to Repeal the Statue Made in the First Year of the Reign of King James the First, Intituled An Act Against Conjuraton, Witchcraft, and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits*. According to Gary Varner, "the Act's premise was that magic and witchcraft did not exist. It prohibited anyone from accusing another of practicing either magic or witchcraft and it forbade anyone

ends in typical (late eighteenth-century) Gothic fashion: evil has been vanquished, good triumphs, the supernatural is rationally explained, and there is a dead body on stage.

As a drama that engages with Scottish and English history, the power of hatred and jealousy, and the dangers of inaccurate assumptions, *Witchcraft* has engendered a significant critical discussion. *Witchcraft* scholarship falls into two fairly distinct camps: the first camp is focused on the political—themes of nationalism, gender, class, and justice—and the second camp is focused on the physical aspects of the play—the character’s bodies, the play’s violent spectacle, the imagined eighteenth-century actors’ bodies, and the real twenty-first century actors’ bodies. I use the words “imagined” and “real” to describe the various ways scholars envision the performance of this play.

Witchcraft was not performed in Baillie’s lifetime although some critics, such as Jeffrey Cox (“Staging Baillie” 165n), had access to a twenty-first century performance. Whether or not scholars have seen a performance of this play, we must all use our historical knowledge and imagination to construct a narrative of what a performance might have looked like in the eighteenth century and what Baillie herself may have envisioned for her drama. We know that she at least considered staging the drama; she writes again to Scott, after completing the manuscript in 1827, “Witches upon a polite stage! will such a thing ever be endorsed!” (*Letters* 441).

Critics who fall in the political camp often make note of the Scottish elements of the play. Baillie was born in Bothwell, Scotland and attended boarding school in Glasgow, but moved to London when she was in her 20s and lived in England most of her

from claiming that they did” (86). This Act repealed the anti-witchcraft law that James I created in 1604 (he used Henry VIII’s 1541 statute that made witchcraft a felony in England) in which “the scope of witch crimes was expanded, which also expanded the numbers of persons accused, arrested, tortured and executed” (Varner 85-6). Baillie’s play was published a century after this 1736 Repeal Act, but takes place in Scotland right before the Act was passed (at the end of the play, a version of this repeal is announced).

life. Dorothy McMillan refers to Baillie as an “expatriate” (71). Despite not living full-time in Scotland, Baillie and her sister, Agnes, did visit in 1808.⁴³ McMillan argues that Baillie made a conscious decision to set the play in Scotland and that she was “far from naive about the political implications of her play” (82). Like McMillan, Alyson Bardsley reads the play as a portrayal of the unjust, circumstantial evidence used in witch trials (231) and Hewitt argues that the play encourages audiences to “look at the interaction between the impoverished women and the privileged families who were supposed to provide for them” (342). Among other scholars, McMillan, Bardsley, and Hewitt interpret *Witchcraft* through the lens of political injustice. They see Baillie’s “hags,” the elderly women of the play who want to become witches, as pitiable. They are victims of a masculinist political system that devalues the old and the poor and a legal system that is reliant on circumstantial evidence. While these scholars are certainly correct, a reading of the play solely through a political lens could discount the physicality required of the play. Critics such as Jeffrey Cox see the dramaturgical value of *Witchcraft*. Cox believes that “*Witchcraft* demonstrates how Baillie would like spectacle to function within her plays” (157); he credits her with a dramaturgical understanding of how “spectacular effects of the stage of her day” could be used to “create her drama of the passions” (146). For Cox, the purpose of the spectacle is to ask the audience to turn inward and consider their own ways of looking. His interpretation of the play contributes to our understanding of how our imagined audience might have reacted to this play. However, this view does not leave him space to fully explore the political implications of those audience reactions. In this chapter, I attempt to bring these two critical camps (the physical and political) together in

⁴³ They “traveled to Glasgow, to the Scottish Highlands, and on to Scott’s home in Edinburgh” (Slagle 128).

my reading of Baillie's *Witchcraft*. Just as Baillie's interest in Scott's hags of *The Bride of Lammermoor* was based in both their interaction with a corpse and their characters' allusion to the murder of thousands of women during the witch burnings, so a reading of *Witchcraft* should encompass a discussion of both the physical *and* political aspects of the play which can co-exist together under the umbrella of a queer reading. A queer reading of the play allows us to consider how the abject bodies of characters like Violet, Annabella, and the Hags experience material consequences as a result of affixed labels. Thus, this chapter reads the interactions between women's bodies and female sexuality alongside the dangers of perception and labeling in witch trials.

Witchcraft's afterlife as a play is limited, but rich. It has an extremely limited performance history. It was not staged in Baillie's lifetime, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not see a performance either. My research revealed only three performances of *Witchcraft*, and all three have taken place in the twenty-first century. Baillie's play premiered in London's Finborough Theatre during May 2008. Reviews were either indifferent or terrible, as critics complained that "her play suffers from excessive theatricality" (Billington). Conor McGlone of the *Australian Times* pointed out that the themes of a corrupt justice system that depends upon circumstantial evidence "gives the play legitimate contemporaneous worth and reminds us not to take our freedoms for granted," and Howard Loxton was surprised by how "natural" the dialogue sounded considering Baillie's reputation of being "a poet whose plays contemporary critics sometimes berated as unsuited to the stage." Most critics drew connections between *Witchcraft*, *Macbeth*, and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*—believing that Shakespeare's play influenced Baillie whose work, in turn, influenced Miller. But their

insight is clearly based on a limited knowledge of late-eighteenth-century British theater. In her reflection on her involvement in the performance of *Witchcraft* at Concordia University in 2011,⁴⁴ Anna Sigg argues, “Since Billington...and Loxton refrain from distinguishing clearly between dramatic text and performance, the lines between the original play and its rewriting (the performance) become blurred.” She believes the reviewers “become active participants in the productions by neglecting to distinguish between text and performance. The dramatic text rewrites the performance and the performance rewrites the underlying text.” Unlike the reviewers, Sigg recognizes the inevitable conversation between the eighteenth-century text and the twenty-first century play; productive and interesting performances arise when they speak to each other.

It is perhaps most helpful to first think of these performances as reenactments of Baillie’s style and of eighteenth-century theater and culture, and then consider that they are actually fairly new performances of a piece written nearly 200 years before them. In a semi-autobiographical theoretical essay about theater and reenactment, Gilli Bush-Bailey explains that she asks her students to use their own contemporary cultural knowledge to connect with and understand how to perform a nineteenth-century play (291). In essence, Bailey does not shy away from fears of anachronism; rather she embraces the ways in which the present can inform the past just as the past informs the present. Or, as David Román eloquently argues, “Rather than insisting on performance’s evanescence, then, we might want to consider the possibility that *contemporary performances revive past performances while past performances are manifest in contemporary ones*” (152). Bailey

⁴⁴ The third staging of *Witchcraft* was a small “concert-style reading and discussion” performed by Armid Theatre in honor of Halloween 2010. Since there are no archived reviews or reactions to the performance, I am unable to make observations about it and thus will not spend time discussing that particular performance.

creates a performance space in which “historical distance is not ignored but worked with” (Bush-Bailey 293), and Román examines how performances can “archive the past even as they restage and reimagine it” (Román 174). Both Bailey and Román suggest that past and present performances naturally speak to each other and depend on one another. In her essay on her dramaturgical research for the Concordia University performance of *Witchcraft*, Joanna Donehower argues, “dramaturgical work is archival, or dependent upon past (recent or distant) repertoires, documents, and library resources. It is also generative, central to the devising of new creative work.” Similar to Bailey and Román, Donehower recognizes the importance of past and present speaking to one another, and she writes specifically about a project that focused on creating that dialogue between past and present through a study of Baillie’s *Witchcraft*.

In 2008, writers, directors, and actors came together to begin a three-year long project which they eventually entitled *Witchcraft: Hypertext and Performance*. This “process of critical engagement with the text” (Leroux “Introduction”) began with the creation of “resonant responses” to select scenes from Baillie’s play, thus enabling those involved in the project to engage in a critical dialogue with the play. The second year saw workshops on Romantic gestural codes and early nineteenth-century performance practices. In the final, third year, the company performed *Witchcraft* in its entirety and used film, pictures, and other media to enhance the play’s themes while maintaining the traditional Romantic gestural codes of nineteenth-century drama. The goal of the entire project was to “bring Baillie’s drama into the contemporary register, layering live performance with video projection and other multimedia elements as one way to negotiate the temporal and aesthetic distance of the play” (Leroux “Introduction”). The

contemporary performance of *Witchcraft* helps reveal the ways that the mass hysteria and the mob mentality of the witch hunts, trials, and burnings are actually similar to contemporary “shame culture”: “*Witchcraft* and the *Resonant Responses* it solicited are very much *about* the production and representation of a form of exposure often called ‘shame,’” writes Meredith Evans—a participant in Concordia University’s *Hypertext and Performance* project. She continues, “Like shame-cultures...or like the ‘culture of fear’ to which we are presently—arguably—acclimatized, this phenomenon pays little attention to the borders of history, culture or indeed personal identity.” The last resonant response, “Milford Haven,” which Patrick Leroux developed after the three-year study of *Witchcraft* “explores the timeless topic of women’s sexuality and men’s attempts to bind it, when they consider it their own, or to unleash and harness it, when it is withheld from them” (Leroux “Milford Haven”). While I do not fully agree with Leroux’s description of men’s interaction with women’s sexuality, the essential point is that when *Witchcraft* is read through a contemporary lens it has a lasting and meaningful effect on players, audiences, and scholars. They internalize the themes of the play and they are able to understand the fear of material consequences that abject bodies feel when they are definitively categorized as bodies of difference.

In her “Introductory Discourse,” Baillie puts forth a theoretical discussion that prefaces her 1798 *Series of Plays*—the first volume of her *Plays on the Passions*. In this critical essay, Baillie discusses the labels that people unconsciously use to categorize everyone they meet: “most people, I believe, without being conscious of it, have stored up in idea the greater part of those strong marked varieties of human character, which may be said to divide it into classes; and in one of those classes they involuntarily place

every new person they become acquainted with” (3). Essentially, Baillie is interested in the way people place each other into categories based on their observations of each other’s behavior; we might also call these behaviors the “invisible rituals [or performances] of everyday life” (Roach *Cities* xi). Baillie’s desire is to convey psychological portraits of characters in the throes of strong emotion: “the characters of the drama must speak for themselves. Under the influence of every passion, humour, and impression; in the artificial veilings of hypocrisy and ceremony, in the openness of freedom and confidence, and in the lonely hour of meditation they speak” (“Introductory Discourse” 24). However, by looking at passions that are hidden and examining labels that are placed upon people based on certain behaviors they exhibit, Baillie also creates a portrait of the consequences of labeling. Her goal to illustrate the passions that arise in a person’s “secret closet” (31) enables her to show human fascination with difference and our unquenchable desire to study that difference: “even the smallest indications of an unquiet mind...will set our attention as anxiously upon the watch, as the first distant flashes of a gathering storm” (10-11); “There is, perhaps, no employment which the human mind will with so much avidity pursue, as the discovery of concealed passion, as the tracing the varieties and progress of a perturbed soul” (11). The material consequences of this “avidity” include unjust laws: “A judicious selection of those circumstances which characterize the spirit of an associated mob, paltry and ludicrous as some of them may appear, will oftentimes convey to our minds a clearer idea why certain laws and privileges were demanded and agreed to, than a methodical explanation of their causes” (17). The mob mentality that results from an unconscious and uncontrollable obsession to categorize and avoid difference can lead to “ludicrous” government policies

that inevitably impose upon the basic rights of the disenfranchised.⁴⁵ Although she does not directly mention the witch hunts of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, reading *Witchcraft* with Baillie's philosophies in mind enables us to recognize her disdain for a fear-driven legal system.⁴⁶ In that vein, we can apply her theories to legal rulings that discriminate against non-normative religious practices, like witchcraft, and non-normative sexualities, like bisexuality. These rulings—like the condemnation of a witchcraft suspect to the stake—are material consequences that result from labeling a body's performance. Once the performance of witchcraft or sexuality is no longer abstract and is enacted by a particular body, language is required to describe that body. These embodied performances, once labeled with our limited language, lead to the physically and mentally damaging material consequences of discrimination. In the next section, I explore a clear manifestation of Baillie's political views through her play *Witchcraft* and the character of Violet Murrey, who is a victim of mob mentality and, though she is innocent, nearly burns for the crime of witchcraft.

III. Violet and the "Witch" Stigma

During the violent witch hunts of the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century, evidence used to determine a person's guilt was circumstantial and fairly thin. In his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, Walter Scott wrote, "the proof led in support of the prosecution was of a kind very unusual in jurisprudence"; yet, "our

⁴⁵ For more on the theater, mob mentality—where the mob is represented by the play's audience—and power politics during the eighteenth century, see Paula Backscheider's *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England*.

⁴⁶ My project does not directly consider Baillie's interactions with the eighteenth-century legal system, but it focuses on the indirect connections between Baillie's intersections of sociological systems and fear with her play. For an excellent reading of *Witchcraft* as a demonstration of flaws in the British legal system, see Bardsley's "Belief and Beyond: The Law, the Nation, and the Drama in Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*."

ancestors...seldom...lost an opportunity of destroying a witch.” Evidence of lesbianism was similarly circumstantial. Emma Donaghue argues that because they were unable to prove (or unwilling to recognize) lesbian sex, “law-makers...punished women who loved women on vaguer charges of lewdness and fraud” (18). In *Witchcraft*, Baillie offers a retrospective on the process of prosecuting witchcraft by illustrating how the label of “witch” is placed upon the young woman, Violet Murrey. The play’s action revolves around Violet, who is suspected of using witchcraft to torment a child and the local authorities nearly execute her for that crime. Through a series of valiant men coming to her rescue, Violet is proven innocent. Violet’s initial guilt is circumstantially determined by her interactions with other women who are actively practicing—or trying to practice—witchcraft. Witnesses who misunderstand and misinterpret what they see believe that Violet is morally and, I would argue, sexually ambiguous. Although she escapes execution, she can only be found innocent when she proves her loyalty to her father and her male suitor—thereby establishing her submission to monogamous, heteronormative ideologies and rejecting any queer possibilities. Violet’s guilt and exoneration are determined by others’ perceptions of her. She has little to no agency and is subject to the labels that other characters place upon her. Through a closer look at Violet Murrey and the mark of “witch” that nearly kills her, this section of my chapter will explore how *Witchcraft* connects the process of a witch hunt to the power of perception and labeling. This section will also consider the ways that the witch hunt is a material consequence of the *perceived* embodied performance of witchcraft.

The play introduces Violet through layers of shadows that cloud the perception of the other characters, including Rutherford—the priest who testifies against her; as a result

of this uncertainty, characters mark Violet as a witch. Violet's first line is indicative of her lack of firm individual identity. She appears on stage, rushes into the arms of a man, and says, "My father! My dear, dear father!" (353). When Violet is finally given a voice (in the third scene) after being discussed by others (in the first scene and the beginning of the third scene), her character immediately identifies herself by speaking the name of her patriarchal guardian. Her father responds with, "My own sweet Violet! All that I can call my own" (353). In this exchange, father and daughter agree that old Murrey is in possession of his daughter and that she must be identified through him. The meetings that follow, however, are intense and at times nearly sexual. Murrey forces her to promise to stay away from Dungarren—a suitor and the traditional hero of the play—and to keep the secret of Murrey's existence from him; he urges, "Call what I feel an excess of distrust—a disease—a perversion of mind, if thou wilt, but solemnly promise to obey me" (377). In Violet and Murrey's exchanges, his passion for her often comes close to "a perversion of mind." The implication of incest teases the audience with the looming possibility of this sexual horror, yet the fact that it is never clear is again an indication of Violet's ambiguity. But it is Murrey's words, not Violet's, that draw her in to this queer relationship. While she continues to profess her love to Dungarren, Murrey's insistence on enacting his patriarchal right to Violet's obedience—and perhaps even her chastity—prevents her from being honest with Dungarren and results in her lover's suspicions of unfaithfulness.

Ultimately, it is the initial meeting with her father that is her undoing. Unbeknownst to the father and daughter, Rutherford observes the meeting and because he—like all the other characters except Violet—believes Murrey is dead, he can only

assume that Violet has been conjuring spirits from the grave (352-353). Rutherford appears to have good intentions as he wrestles with his skepticism about witchcraft and eventually confides in Dungarren: “Were a daughter of my own concerned, I could not be more distressed” (361). But the combination of superstitions and religion cloud his vision of Violet; despite his initial skepticism of the existence of witchcraft, he cannot conjure another explanation for what he saw. Thus, he falls back on the mass fear that superstition creates, and admits, “That I must swear to the truth of what I have seen...is my only clear point of discernment” (387). His trusted testimony leads to Violet’s conviction. She only escapes death because her father and a male servant speak up on her behalf; while their testimonies are true and Violet has never actually practiced witchcraft, the necessity of her reliance on the men of the play indicates the necessity of her submission to heteronormative ideologies. Christine Colón argues that even though Violet survives, the ending is still “disturbing” because she “survive[s] only through the actions of various men” and because she has “no power to save [herself] but must wait for [men] to save [her].” Although Colón does not directly refer to sexuality politics, I would argue that the question of Violet’s heteronormative sexuality eventually contributes to her lover’s perception of her as a sexually ambiguous body.⁴⁷ As Colón suggests, the danger Violet may exhibit—her threat to heteronormative ideologies—is entirely managed through the men around her. Violet has no ability to control others’ perceptions of her and thus falls victim to the labels placed upon her.

⁴⁷ On several occasions, Dungarren surprises Violet in the middle of her hasty meetings with old Murrey and—not realizing that she is with her father—he suspects her of being unfaithful. Dungarren’s assumptions emphasize the incestuous possibilities of Violet’s body: “What I have seen with mine eyes leaves you nothing to tell which I am concerned to hear... You have put it out of my power to be generous” (379).

Even though Rutherford sees her in the company of a dead man and three witches, she still does not appear evil to him. “Violet Murrey, the young, the unfortunate, the gentle, and, I firmly believe, the innocent,” laments the priest, “to give evidence to her prejudice—it is a fearful duty” (386). He does not want to testify against Violet because something, perhaps his heart or his instincts, is telling him she is innocent. Yet that night in the forest he saw Violet through the lens of his cultural and religious assumptions: that witchcraft and the supernatural are the source for events that he cannot readily identify as rational. The Sheriff, who agrees with Rutherford but is also more firmly rooted in his belief in witchcraft, responds to him sternly, “It is so, good Sir; yet it must be done. I have taken into custody, on accusation of witchcraft, the fairest woman in the west of Scotland; and you must answer on oath to the questions that may be put to you, whether it be for or against her” (386). This conversation between the priest and the Sheriff represents the subject of nearly the entire fourth Act: characters question Violet Murrey’s guilt and innocence and ultimately err on the side of the “evidence.” Yet they are clearly troubled by the conflicts between the evidence against Violet and her seemingly innocent mannerisms when she obeys the Gaoler and the Sheriff with gentleness and quietness. They are confused by this contradiction—the unclear connection between the evidence they have gathered and her apparent innocence. The characters of the play perceive Violet as an embodiment of ambiguity, and because they cannot understand this paradoxical perception of her innocence they defer to the only explanation that makes sense: Violet *must* be guilty. Thus, they place the guilty label upon her.

Lady Dungarren—mother of Robert Kennedy, master of the castle—gives the clearest voice to the paradoxical attitude of the plays’ characters: both convinced of

Violet's guilt yet resistant to her conviction, she says, "You make me tremble, Violet Murrey: if you are innocent, who can be guilty?" (399). The Lady's doubts are indicative of her fears about Violet's ambiguity and the threatening label of "witch." She believes that there *must* be a witch tormenting her child—for Lady Dungarren there is no other explanation apart from witchcraft; thus, she needs to find a person who fits that label in order to give the intangible evil a tangible body. The Gaoler reflects the Lady's feelings as he concludes the scene with, "I wish [the execution] were over" (400). The Gaoler's determination to believe Violet guilty and his desire to experience closure through witnessing her punishment mirrors Lady Dungarren's need to erase the tangible, bodily representation of evil. It is significant that the Gaoler and Lady Dungarren express the same feelings here; there is a clear class distinction, but they are both viewing Violet through the same cultural fear of witchcraft. Each character is a representation of his/her class: the Gaoler gives voice to the poorer working class, while the Lady speaks for Scottish nobility.⁴⁸ Together, they represent the extremes of class stratification and, in doing so, they represent the wide spectrum of classes within society who all—in the world of the play—feel the same deep-seated fear of witches. What's more, both Lady Dungarren and the Gaoler are in positions of power. Given, the Gaoler has significantly less power than the Lady, but each of the two characters has the ability to determine the fate of others' bodies in the context of their position. The Gaoler has control of his prisoners and the Lady of her household. In this sense, the Gaoler and the Lady are in direct opposition to the three elderly women—the reputed witches—and Violet who have no power whatsoever. Their threat becomes even more pronounced when this imbalanced

⁴⁸ For more on the class system of eighteenth-century Scottish society see Christopher Whatley's *Scottish Society, 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Toward Industrialisation*.

power dynamic is revealed; the reputed witches and Violet have no power to lose, thus they can only gain power. Characters in positions of power, even meager ones, cannot allow the witches to shift this balance, because any power gained by those witches would decrease the power held by the other characters. Thus, once Violet is associated with the label, “witch,” she cannot prove her innocence on her own, despite how “fair” or “gentle” she appears. The Gaoler and the Lady cannot give her that power to define/categorize herself or to remain uncategorized. Their wish for finality emphasizes the permanence of that “witch” label. The public’s perception of Violet becomes the ruling factor in her identity. Although she is actually innocent of witchcraft, her life and death will be marked by the stigma of the label that others have now placed upon her.

IV. “Are not witches always old and poor?”: *The Hags and the Disenfranchised Spinster*

Like Violet, the reputed witches of the play—Grizeld Bane, Mary Macmurren, and Elspy Low—are victims of labeling. Other characters cite the women’s old age, poverty, and closeness with each other as proof that they are probably all witches. Ultimately, though Grizeld, Mary, and Elspy are pitiable, gullible victims of either men’s tricks or their own madness, their desire to be more than poor, old women makes them appear dangerous to the play’s other characters. Most of the criticism on the reputed witches revolves around medicine and science (mainly Grizeld’s insanity and Elspy’s son’s idiocy). Critics such as Marjean Purinton and Karen Dwyer read Baillie’s plays as commentary on the emerging medical discourse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Purinton argues that both the gothic and science “were discursive fields upon which anxieties about social identity and physicality could be displaced”

(“Socialized and Medicalized Hysteria” 140); so playwrights meld the two fields by using Gothic drama to explore the more disturbing elements of science—she calls this process “techno-gothic” (140). Purinton believes that Baillie, by participating in techno-gothic through her play *Witchcraft*, exposes the similarities between the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witch hunts and the “medical practices intent on dominating, controlling and persecuting women” during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (142). Critics such as Purinton do an excellent job of outlining how Baillie’s imaginative drama about witchcraft interacts with real-world debates about hysteria, but they have not speculated about how those reputed witches might have been represented on stage.⁴⁹

Throughout the Restoration and into early nineteenth century, witches were comic figures, and there is a rich history of androgyny in the eighteenth-century stage’s depiction of witchcraft. As representations of the grotesque but also the absurd, witches were conventionally played by men and their scenes were often musical (Winkler 19; Munro 134). Although male comedians played witches, their characters become—as Amanda Winkler puts it—“troubling” because the male body made that character androgynous (19). As Lyndal Roper notes, the witch figure is most often painted as an old woman or hag who no longer has the ability to conceive. She has an aggressive jealousy of fertile women that causes her to attack children in order to revenge herself upon the mothers she envies (97). Her aggressiveness and particularly her infertility characterizes

⁴⁹ This is most likely due to the fact that Baillie’s play was not staged during her lifetime. Slagle writes, “*Witchcraft* was not introduced on the stage, however, though it is one of Baillie’s most chilling gothic dramas” (267).

her as unfeminine and therefore, in the world of binaries, masculine.⁵⁰ On stage, the witch was represented as masculine in order to indicate “her usurpation of masculine privileges through her pact with the Devil”; in addition, the masculine depiction “provided physical evidence of her internal spiritual deformity: her grotesque outside reflected her tainted soul” (Winkler 20). Yet by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, critics—particularly female critics—were questioning these comedic portrayals of witches on stage. Lucy Munro demonstrates, through Anna Jameson’s description of Sara Siddons reading a scene from William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1611), that women read Shakespeare’s witches with much more gravity; Munro traces this tendency to read witches differently from 1800-1850 and concludes, “women in the mid-nineteenth century began to develop their own ‘reading’ of Shakespeare’s witches in a range of different media—performance, criticism, illustration and fiction” (140). While these women did not suggest that witches be played by actresses, the implication was that the witch figure be more feminine in order to appear more dangerous. This is certainly not the first time witches were feminized. From Medea and Calypso to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, witches were associated with female power. In *The Witch in History*, Diane Purkiss purposes, “the witch could represent women’s fantasies...about the female body in general and the maternal body in particular” (119). The witches’ power and control prompts fear of female sexuality *and* production that threatens a patriarchal culture (212). However, after gaining popularity as a comic figure in the eighteenth

⁵⁰ Winkler outlines the another, stranger reason why witches were often characterized as masculine or androgynous: “According to humoral theory, a young woman was thought to be cold and wet, while a man was hot and dry. As people of both sexes aged, they become colder and drier. Thus, an older woman, as she became drier, would gain certain masculine traits such as facial hair and a deep voice” (20).

century, the Siddons reading that Munro examines evidences the arch back toward a more serious examination of the witch as woman.

As Baillie's play was conceived, written, and published in the middle of this evolution of the witch figure on stage, her three witches recall the Weird Sisters from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* even as Baillie's witches move away from their theatrical Scottish ancestors. Purkiss suggests that the witches of *Macbeth* are more like "prophets, rather than witches" and that they "raise the questions of meaning and truth which James [I] had begun to understand as central to witchcraft" (207). Shakespeare, Purkiss argues, characterizes the witch figure as mystical spectacle that cannot be interpreted by the play's characters and must therefore rely on outside interpretation of the spectators or audience to draw meaning (207). Rather than give the women human dimension, Shakespeare categorizes his witches in "a special class of being, like monsters or mermaids" so that they are more than "odd old women" or "ordinary women who have sinned" (210). The Weird Sisters are ambiguously gendered (they are women with masculine beards) in addition to being ambiguously human (211), and it is this ambiguity that frightens both character and audience.

Baillie's witches certainly embody multiple stereotypes of the witch figure, but they also induce audience sympathy rather than fear. Because, most importantly, they are not really witches at all. Like Scott's characters from *The Bride of Lamermore*, Baillie's reputed witches are the elderly women in the community that lack power. Christine Colón suggests that these women "attempt to use witchcraft in various ways to gain power" and that through her play "Baillie reveals that [witchcraft's] dangers lie not in the supposed communication with the Devil but rather in the patriarchal society that denies them any

power and then corrupts and destroys them when they attempt to empower themselves” (xxxiv). Colón emphasizes Baillie’s view of the disenfranchisement of women in general. However, in addition to their social positions as women and as members of the poor lower class, Baillie’s reputed witches (Grizeld Bane, Elspy Low, and Mary Macmurren) are also elderly. They are the first to be suspected of witchcraft, and they are also the first to desire it. Although they never actually obtain power, Baillie uses Grizeld, Elspy, and Mary to explore the disenfranchisement of elderly women during a time in her life when she was very much aware of what it means to be a spinster in British society.

The reputed witches immediately strike the audience as pitiable, powerless, desperate figures. Comparing the chant of Grizeld, Elspy and Mary to the witches of *Macbeth* reveals a significant difference in the power and agency of the two groups of women. The words of Shakespeare’s witches are forceful and indicate their ability to control their power:

Round about the caldron go:
In the poison entrails throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelt’red venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i’ th’ charmed pot.
All. Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn and caldron bubble. (IV.i.4-11)

The Weird Sisters speak directly to the caldron and fire, commanding it to “bubble” and “burn”; their lines are statements of their will. Their chant indicates that they have control

over their situation—that they can choose what magic they want to implement. In addition, as Purkiss argues, the caldron of *Macbeth* is “a reminder of women’s control over food production.” The Weird Sisters use shocking ingredients that “transgress the boundaries of the acceptable and clear,” and in this way the caldron “draw attention to a sphere of feminine power separate from sexuality but equally threatening to men” (212). The witches of *Macbeth* have the power to thwart the natural world; their power means these women most likely hold all the influence in their interactions with the other. Conversely, Baillie’s reputed witches are in a position of supplication. They meet in the forest to conjure up a male helper (the devil) to give them power. Where the Weird Sisters already have power and are moving in that power, it is clear that the *Witchcraft* witches’ chant asks for power that they do not yet have:

To the right, to the right, to the right we wheel;

Thou heaving earth, free passage give, and our dark prince reveal....

To the left, to the left, to the left we go;

Ye folding clouds, your curtain rend, and our great master show. (350)

Rather than using their words to take control of their situation, the women speaking this chant are desperately calling out to a “dark prince” to appear and give them power. Unlike the Weird Sisters, who impose their own power upon society, Grizeld, Elspy, and Mary are asking for permission to obtain power from a masculine source. Through this overt difference, Baillie shows the reality of what it means to be an older woman in eighteenth-century British society. Society prevents them from claiming individuality, thus they must turn to patriarchal sources for any social power or material means. A scene in which the women believe they are discussing the terms of selling their souls directly

with the devil further emphasizes the pitiable figure of these women. The audience, however, knows that they are speaking with Murrey, who pretends that he is an evil supernatural being capable of bestowing on them “Power over good and chattels, or power over bodies and spirits” (351). The women are fooled; they are convinced that “there’s power to be had” (363). Yet the audience knows that they will never obtain power from Murrey. He is just a man with no supernatural power. Thus, the women are portrayed as both desperate and gullible. In addition, their leader Grizeld Bane is eventually revealed to be insane. Baillie does not allow her reputed witches to die and, by revealing Annabella—the young, pretty, upper-class companion to Lady Dungarren—to be the true villain of the play, somewhat redeems them as misguided and unfortunate. However, the entire play highlights again and again their disenfranchised positions. Like the results of witch labels and sexuality labels, embodied old age leads to material consequences of dismissal by and from society. Thus, older women are relegated to the outskirts of society along with witches and bisexuals, so we could argue that they share the space under the umbrella of the queer position. In addition, as we will see in an exploration of Baillie’s biography, elderly women who have close relationships with each other exude a Sapphic energy that is either culturally ignored or feared but never embraced.

Joanna Baillie and the Spinster Figure

Joanna Baillie's own life parallels that of her play's reputed witches. Although she is certainly less gullible and much more successful, her contemporaries and even her modern day biographers view her through the lens of spinsterhood. As a woman that was never married and was always writing, she is an abject body that struggles to create an image of normativity. As she grew older, Baillie lived in what her obituary termed "strict seclusion" (Urban 439), leaving her home mainly to visit the poor and sick (Looser 24). Although she actively engaged her mind in religious and political ideologies through her controversial writing,⁵¹ she also "played the role of dispassionate gentlewoman" (Slagle 298). She "demonstrated...conventional feminine delicacy, advertising to the world that [she was] withdrawing from public life" (Looser 24). These apparent contradictions can be explained by looking at Baillie's final 20 years of life as a performance of proper aging. In her study on *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750-1850*, Devony Looser argues that older women of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were expected to operate in quiet retirement. While many female authors defied this social expectation, we can guess that Baillie used social codes to her advantage by devoting herself to philanthropy in her final years. By appearing charitable and therefore 'useful,' we could argue that Baillie was able to maintain her literary popularity. Looser notes, "It is difficult to tell how much impact these activities had on Baillie's continuing to draw a readership in her old age, but we would be unwise to discount it entirely." Although she

⁵¹ Specifically, her essay entitled *A View of the General Tenour of the New Testament Regarding the Nature and Dignity of Jesus Christ* (1831) in which she argues for Unitarian principles that "emphasiz[es] the unipersonality of God in opposition to Trinitarianism; more important is its focus on the goodness of mankind and on respect for human achievements" (Slagle 234). For further description of the controversy in Christian theology between Baillie and Thomas Burgess, Bishop of Salisbury, see Judith Slagle's *Joanna Baillie: A Literary Life*—especially pages 231-245.

did not have an “image consultant,” she “seemed to understand the benefit of such efforts to engage in that work on [her] behalf” (24).

While Baillie was certainly willing and able to take controversial stances and push for political change, she chose to *perform a character*. Much like twenty-first-century celebrities, not to mention earlier examples, Baillie created an image for the public.⁵² The success of her performance is clear in her obituary, which describes her as “gentle and unassuming to all, with an unchangeable simplicity of manner and character” (Urban 439). While the public may have believed her to be a ‘sweet old lady,’ her 1836 collection of *Dramas*—the multivolume work of tragedies and comedies that includes *Witchcraft*—is full of her feminist viewpoints. Marjean Purinton suggests that Baillie’s female characters could be “identified as Tommys, inverters, spinsters, enthusiasts, or prostitutes, but they point to the possibilities of rescripting cultural and medical meanings of female desire and erotic experience” (“Feminist Utopianism”). The religious and political arguments that Baillie made through the dramas, poems, and essays of her later years contradict her public image of a philanthropic soul who devotes herself to nothing but caring for others and keeping out of the way. With her apparent self-fashioning in mind, I suggest that Baillie was highly conscious of the position older women were socially expected to cultivate and that she addresses her concerns about their lack of power and respect through the reputed witches of *Witchcraft*. While Baillie, as an author, had an outlet for her voice, many older women did not. Baillie is drawn to Scott’s hags in *The Bride of Lammermoore* in part because she can relate to their feelings of powerlessness.

⁵² Laura Engel’s *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* is a fascinating exploration of actresses’ cultivating their public image in order to maintain and increase their celebrity. Although slightly tangential to this chapter, this work is worth noting for those interested in celebrity studies.

So she takes a brief scene from Scott's novel and expands it into a fuller exploration of the disenfranchisement and demonization of older women.

Classical Witches in an Eighteenth-Century Bisexual Context

The history of representation of the witch figure, as outlined by Lyndal Roper,⁵³ indicates that witches were not usually depicted as bearded and elderly. For much of history, the female witch was a symbol of threatening sexual power. In classical literature, women such as Circe and Medea were young, beautiful, and frightening in their ability to take power away from men. Both used their bodies to distract the hero of their tales from their purpose. Medea in particular draws from traditions of masculine magic even as she is best known for her role as a vengeful mother. This classical tradition of the witch figure as sexually ambiguous and sexually threatening continued to be present in eighteenth-century art. Baillie's own friend, Anne Damer, a controversial sexual figure in her own right, commissioned a painting by Daniel Gardner that depicts three women as Shakespeare's Weird sisters. However, unlike the typical portrait of Shakespeare's witches, Damer and her friends model for witches that are young, attractive, and enticing. In this painting, *Witches 'Round the Cauldron*, we find a bridge between Shakespeare, bisexuality, and *Witchcraft*. Baillie's friends, fascinated by Shakespeare's witches but desirous of depicting a more classical style of witch figure, pose for Gardner as sexually threatening sorceresses. Similar to how Baillie transforms Shakespeare's witches from clearly evil beings of power to morally ambiguous and pitiable elderly women, Damer transforms Shakespeare's witches into young, sapphic, sexually threatening bodies.

⁵³ For more on Roper's research, see my Introduction to this chapter.

Damer's witches look much more like Annabella than Grizeld Bane, and her type of witch is certainly present in Baillie's play.

The most popular witch figures in Greek and Latin literature are the sisters, Circe and Medea. Circe, the first witch to appear in Greek literature, is most often remembered for her interaction with Odysseus and his men in Homer's *The Odyssey*. After their escape from the Land of the Midnight Sun, Odysseus and his crew arrive on Circe's island. She gives them a drink with a potion that makes them forget their homeland and turns Odysseus's men into pigs. She only turns them back into humans when Odysseus forces her to swear that she will not trick him again and sleeps with her. The rational source of Odysseus's fear should be Circe's ability to turn him into a pig and make him forget Ithaca. However, right before entering her bedroom, he expresses his fear that when he is naked Circe will "unman" him and "make [him] a weakling" (119). Odysseus's fear of Circe stems from his perception that she has power over his masculinity. Her erotic magic is threatening in the arch of *The Odyssey*, because she uses it to prevent Odysseus from returning home. The magic she uses characterizes her as yet another evil obstacle in the hero's path back to his faithful wife. Circe stands in the way of a patriarchal imperative.

Medea appears to be just as threatening to masculinity as her sister, and rather than simply thwarting men she also takes on masculine characteristics. In his commentary on Diodorus' account of Medea's story, Daniel Ogden argues, "Medea is, importantly, bound in with traditions of male sorcery. She is the granddaughter and niece of Perses and the mother of the Medus, named for her, through whom she is explicitly said to have engendered the Median race....She also poses as a Hyperborean..., and in so

doing salutes the shaman tradition of Aristeas and Abaris” (82). The Medea figure in classical literature pulls from the past in her references to figures of male shamans and ties together two nations by being a descendent of the Persians (Perses) and a mother of the Medes (Medus). Medea’s most well-known story is depicted in drama form by both Greek and Latin playwrights—Euripides and Seneca, respectively. In both versions, her husband Jason leaves her for Creusa, King Creon’s daughter, and she kills her children as an act of vengeance. However, Seneca’s characteristic of Medea as dually gendered emphasizes her threat to patriarchal society. As Creon tries to explain why he has chosen to banish her, he calls Medea “a woman in recklessness / but a man in strength of will. I must purge my kingdom / from the deadly poison I think you are” (ln. 269-71). Creon’s statement implies that Medea is a “deadly poison” because she manifests characteristics of two genders. He believes she is feminine in her emotions and masculine in her violent actions—her use of magic. Her embodiment of both masculine and feminine attributes makes her dangerous; her strong presence of mind (her “strength of will”) frightens Creon to such an extent that he feels the need to “purge” his kingdom of this duo-gendered body as he might rid his own body of a poison. Just as Odysseus feared Circe’s domination over his body, Creon perceives the threat Medea poses to the kingdom as a personal threat to his own physical health. Like Odysseus, Creon senses a threat to his patriarchal line. Both Circe and Medea are dangerous because of their ability to wield power that the men around them cannot access.

Though Baillie does not identify Circe and Medea as inspirations for her own witches, she was friends with two women who are subjects of a painting with remarkably similar themes: Mary Berry and Anne Damer. Both dear friends of Horace Walpole

(Slagle 117-118), Berry and Damer were widely rumored to be in a Sapphic relationship.⁵⁴ Baillie “often allowed Berry and...Damer to read her works in progress” (Slagle 119). In her biography of Baillie, Judith Bailey Slagle cites a letter from Baillie to Berry in which she discusses the “good many pencil marks” Damer made on a draft of *The Family Legend* (119). Jonathan David Gross, in his biography of Anne Damer, suggests that Damer was a chief influence in Baillie’s choice of subject for this play (43). The association between Damer and Baillie has not been widely explored. If nothing else, their friendship suggests that Baillie was happy to engage intellectually and socially with non-heteronormative, socially questionable women. Being an unmarried older woman, Baillie perhaps felt she could relate to women like Damer and Berry, as all of them embodied queer positions—Damer and Berry as potentially sapphic lovers and Baillie as a spinster who does not fully retire as she is socially meant to. It is difficult to ignore the Sapphic energy that likely surrounded Baillie as she wrote.

In addition to being a friend of Baillie, Damer was in a fairly public romantic relationship with Berry; she had been married to and was attracted to men, as well as women. She commissioned Daniel Gardner to paint a picture of herself, Lady Melbourne, and the Duchess of Devonshire as the three witches of *Macbeth*, which Gardner titled *Witches ‘Round the Cauldron* (1775).⁵⁵ Gross argues, “in choosing this subject from *Macbeth*, Anne seemed determined to define femininity on her own terms” (37). Damer creates a bisexual femininity by intersecting the threat of magic with the threat of sexual desire. She makes the witch figure younger and more erotic—similar to the witches of

⁵⁴ For more on this relationship, see Jonathan David Gross’ engaging biography, *The Life of Anne Damer: Portrait of the Regency Artist*, especially Chapter 21: “That Thread That Holds Minds Together” (259-273).

⁵⁵ Gardner’s painting is currently housed at the National Portrait Gallery in London, and a digital image of the painting can be viewed on the Gallery’s website: npr.org.uk.

ancient mythology, Medea and Circe. This younger, sexually appealing witch implies a threat to the patriarchal society because the audience (including men *and* women) are more likely to fall victim to her advances and spells. There is a double threat here: 1. The threat of obtaining power from and control over the masculine viewer, and 2. The threat of drawing in the feminine viewer and causing her to experience erotic pleasure. In this portrait, Damer appears to return the gaze of the audience through her own bisexually-charged gaze. This painting reveals the power of youth and beauty.

Like *The Odyssey* and *Medea*, *Witches 'Round the Cauldron* threatens patriarchal power; additionally, it depicts the three women gaining power from the eroticism between them. Gross writes that the witch figures of the painting, “lie outside the bounds of patriarchy, including primogeniture and arranged marriage, and issue decrees that defy Macbeth’s and even Gardner’s rational queries” (45). This sapphic eroticism more closely follows classical literature’s depiction of witchcraft. In the ancient world, erotic magic had the power to encourage non-heteronormative sexual behavior among women. Daniel Ogden cites a record of a “lesbian binding curse” in his extensive sourcebook, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*: “I adjure you, Euangelos, by Anubis, Hermes, and the remaining powers of the underworld, to bring and bind Sarapias, to whom Helen gave birth, to Heraeis, to whom Thermoutharin gave birth, now, now, quickly, quickly. Draw her by her soul and heart to Sarapais” (234). While lesbian binding curses do not appear to be common, their existence alongside heterosexual attraction curses and the intensity of the language (“draw her soul and heart”) imply that lesbian behavior was a part of the culture of witchcraft in the ancient world. The sapphic sexuality present in classical representations of witches and Damer’s witchy bisexual

gaze in Gardner's painting, when juxtaposed alongside Baillie's *Witchcraft*, reveal the fluid sexual nature of the witch figure. In the following section, I further explore how that fluid sexuality and the bisexual gaze produce material consequences for Annabella's body.

V. Annabella and the Bisexual Gaze

Violet's lack of agency is largely the result of the play's villain, Annabella, who is a lens through which both the other characters and the audience perceive Violet. Annabella, who nurses a passion for Robert Kennedy of Dungarren, frames Violet for witchcraft in the hopes that the label of "witch" will cause Dungarren to turn his affections away from Violet. Critics agree that she is, what Cox refers to as "the truly destructive figure" of the play—the "evil [that] comes disguised" (157). Regina Hewitt argues that the other characters, particularly Griseld Bane, recognize Annabella as the "real witch" of the play: "Clearly, the greater threat comes from Annabella, whose plot nearly succeeds because the villagers are all too willing to believe her accusations" (347). Annabella's accusations and fear mongering are the actual threats of the play; she represents the "uncontrolled passions" (Baillie *Witchcraft* 415) that Baillie both explores and condemns in most of her dramas. Much like DeMonfort's hatred of Rezenvelt,⁵⁶ Annabella's hatred of Violet is erotic and obsessive, and it quickly evolves into a feverish preoccupation with Violet's body. Annabella's dual attraction to Dungarren and Violet is a fairly clear representation of bisexuality, but her desire to place the witch label onto

⁵⁶ George Haggerty writes of Baillie's *De Monfort*, "Anyone could be forgiven for interpreting De Monfort's obsession with Rezenvelt as erotic. In fact, I would argue, the play works to dramatize the consequences of same-sex desire between these men and to expose its full (and fully contradictory) function in normative culture" ("Psychodrama" 26).

Violet indicates that she wants to shine the spotlight on Violet. She would rather remain in the shadows; or, she would prefer to be the enactor of the gaze rather than the object of it. While the plot of the play indicates that she is a villain, we could also read Annabella as a misunderstood queer figure. She fully understands the consequences of labels and tries to maneuver her way out from under them, but she ultimately fails because her character's afterlife⁵⁷ is labeled as the "witch." In addition to her villainous afterlife, Annabella embodies the bisexual gaze and enacts that gaze upon Violet. By considering both her position as the "real witch" of the play and her embodiment of bisexual desire, Annabella further emphasizes the material consequences of fluid female sexuality.

Annabella's desire for Violet's body is clearest in her asides. Through a series of descriptions that include a "forehead...covered with blushing shame" and a "voice" that "alter[s] and hesitate[s]" (343), Annabella conjures up the image of Violet's body before Violet actually enters the stage. During this same aside, Annabella narrates Violet's body as one that "excite[s] aversion and contempt" and also one that "engross[es]...affections" (343). Before the audience even sees Violet, Annabella encourages the audience to focus on Violet's physical body. Annabella's discussion of Violet's body indicates that she has been watching her and obtaining a kind of pleasure from that act of watching.

Annabella's viewing serves as a model for the bisexual gaze.

⁵⁷ My discussion of characters is nestled in the theoretical framework David Brewer establishes with his book, *The Afterlife of Character*. He discusses "imaginative expansion" as "an umbrella term for an array of reading practices in eighteenth-century Britain by which the characters in broadly successful texts were treated as if they were both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all. Far from being the final word on the subject, the ordinary representation of these characters was, for readers engaged in these practices, merely a starting point—a common reference, but one perpetually inviting supplementation through the invention of additional details and often entirely new adventures" (2). While Annabella does not have much of an afterlife compared to a character such as Lady Macbeth, twenty-first century productions of the play and twenty-first century critics of the play emphasize violence and evil in her character. I will discuss the connection between the afterlives of Annabella and Lady Macbeth, and the afterlife of *Witchcraft* in the subsection entitled "Annabella as Revision of Lady Macbeth."

Annabella's gaze is not a male gaze—it does not come from a place of masculine privilege; nor is her gaze a strictly feminine gaze—she is by no means passive. She is not necessarily straight—she obsesses over a female body that “engross[es]” her “affections”; nor is she strictly a lesbian—she desires Dungarren. Her true emotions are slightly more complex than simply being attracted or not to a particular person. There is a push and pull of power between her relationships with Dungarren and Violet; Annabella has huge amounts of power over Violet but little to no power over Dungarren. Yet she is still able to manipulate Dungarren's happiness through the process of framing Violet. Unlike the lesbian gaze that Dolan and Straayer theorize, there is not always a mutual looking or a shared gaze between Annabella and Violet. Annabella's gaze is similar to a male gaze because she is the active viewer and she gains pleasure from objectifying and fantasizing about (then following through with that fantasy about) manipulating Violet's body. Yet her position cannot be wholly masculine because she gains pleasure from Violet and then looks to Dungarren for approval. These contradictions point to the paradoxical nature of the bisexual gaze: a gaze that embodies both and neither of the masculine and feminine subject positions, both and neither of the heterosexual and homosexual subject positions.

In order to frame Violet, Annabella obtains one of her gowns, cuts a hole in it, returns the gown, and leaves the torn out piece in the bedroom of the child who is supposedly being tormented by witchcraft. In an aside, as Annabella considers handling the garment, she expresses her feelings about Violet as “a fearful and dangerous pleasure” (374). The ability to control the garment directly leads to Annabella's ability to control others' perceptions of Violet. Violet is suspected of witchcraft as a result of Annabella's manipulation of her clothing. Annabella's obsession with Violet also influences the

audience's perception of Violet as the object of a bisexual gaze. Although Violet expresses nothing apart from indifference toward Annabella, Violet's emotions have no consequence. She has no control over audience perception because both her physical body and her sexuality are screened through Annabella's words and actions.

In her brilliant book, *The Actor in Costume*, Aoife Monks creates a theoretical framework for how the costume works in the theater: she argues that costuming can “invoke the audience's deeply complicated act of looking at the surface of the actor's body, and allows us [to] recognise how the performance might not want us to ‘see’ the actor's surface, but rather encourage us to look beyond, past, or through it to some imaginary internal substance or being” (3). Monks suggests that the costume is inescapably connected to both the audience's interpretation of the character and the subtext of the character's movements in that costume. In addition to the body of the actor wearing the costume, Monks' theories about how the costume affects the body in contact with it can also apply to the body that handles a costume. Specifically, when Annabella tears the piece of material from Violet's dress, her contact with the dress emphasizes her intimacy with the owner of the garment. In addition, the action of tearing happens off stage, which gives this action a sense of mystery and hidden-ness. Thus, the audience must imagine a narrative for what Annabella did with the garment: how she held it, what she used to tear a piece of the dress—did she use her bare hands—and how the garment was passed from Violet's servant to Black Bawldy to Annabella and back again. The dress never actually appears on stage but is central to several discussions revolving around Violet's body and accusations of witchcraft.⁵⁸ These conversations about a piece

⁵⁸ In an attempt to convince Black Bawldy to help her procure the gown, Annabella tells him the garment will help the sick child: “a garment that has been upon the body of a murderer or the child of a murderer,—

of clothing that happen on-stage encourage audiences to, as Monks writes, “look beyond, past, or through” the clothing. Audiences must consider what this garment embodies.⁵⁹

The garment is particularly important because the exchange of the dress creates both metaphorical and literal intimacies between Annabella and Violet. Even though the dress is not a physical prop for the play, it is so central to proving Violet’s guilt that it also becomes central to further understanding Annabella’s desire for Violet’s body. Laura Engel writes of the performative effects of objects: “Archival object[s] (letters, diaries, photographs, clothing, pictures, jewelry etc.) conjure the specific scene(s) in which they once existed; they are inextricably linked to embodied performances which are now lost. In addition to conjuring visible aspects of particular scenes, archival objects also echo intangible acts that leave no visible trace” (“The Secret Lives of Archives” 5). Chris Straayer argues that “female bonding”—which is not necessarily physical—“acquires a physical quality from the presence of personal items that, when exchanged, suggest intimacy” (18). In *Witchcraft*, Violet’s dress, in its absence, is a ghostly imprint of an “embodied performance which [is] now lost.” The dress that is constantly referenced but never seen is an intangible archive of Annabella’s desire for Violet *and* Dungarren. We

it does not matter which,—put under the pillow of a witched bairn, will recover it from fits, were it ever so badly tormented” (373). Later, when Black Bawldy finds out about Violet’s sentence, he expresses his regret to Annabella: “she’s condemned! she’ll be executed, she’ll be burnt...and a’ through my putting that sorrowful’ gown into your hands” (389-390). And he explains how the evidence was displayed: “It was that gown spread out in the court, wi’ a hold in the sleeve o’t, matching precisely to a piece o’ the same silk...that made baith judge and jury condemn her” (390).

⁵⁹ An exhibition by John Styles entitled *Threads of Feeling* reveals the deep emotional significance that clothing can hold. The exhibition housed at the London Foundling Museum in 2010-2011 contained pieces of eighteenth-century fabric that represented the connection between a child given up for adoption and her mother: “The pieces of fabric were kept as tokens that could be used to identify the child if it was to be returned to its mother” (Styles “Threads of Feeling”). In a review of the piece of the Washington Post, Katherine Boyle writes of the swatches of fabric, “Some mothers illustrated enduring love with hearts and butterflies, symbols of innocence that displayed their deep attachment to their children. The most wrenching part of the exhibition is the mostly unrealized hope that mothers would return to claim their children.” For more on this project, see Styles’ book, *Threads of Feeling: The London Foundling Hospital’s Textile Tokens 1740-1770*.

image Annabella, who claims at first that she wants the “striped lutestring gown” to “look at the pattern of it,” holding the dress in her hands. Perhaps she takes a knife to the dress and enacts a phallic penetration upon it. Perhaps she uses her hands to manipulate and rend the sleeve’s material. In either scenario, she performs violence on the gown in part to appease her jealousy of both Dungarren’s love for Violet and, I would argue, Violet’s love for Dungarren. She acquires it through the back channels of servants in order to hide her desire for it. And in the very moment her interaction with the garment becomes public knowledge—when Bawldy confesses to obtaining the dress for her—Griseld Bane murders her: “*Repeated shrieks are heard from the window of a house, and two figures are seen indistinctly within, struggling: a dull stifled sound succeeds, and then a sudden silence*” (408). Once Annabella’s handling of the dress—the archive of her desire for Violet—is known, her bisexual gaze is no longer secret and must be eradicated.

Annabella as Revision of Lady Macbeth

Within *Witchcraft*, we see a dialogue between the early seventeenth-century past and the late eighteenth-century present; the afterlife of Lady Macbeth haunts the play. There are allusions to Shakespeare throughout nearly all of Baillie’s plays. Karen Dwyer argues that Baillie’s general focus on the passions recalls the themes of *Othello* and *Macbeth* (32). Walter Scott also compares Baillie to Shakespeare in his poem, *Marmion; A Tale of Flodden Field*, and she was widely known as “the female Shakespeare” during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Fiona Ritchie argues that Scott “positioned [Baillie] as the inheritor of Shakespeare’s genius” (144).⁶⁰ Also, the three

⁶⁰ Ritchie details a convincing argument that “one of the reasons for Baillie’s success as a closet dramatist but apparent failure as a writer for the stage lies in the identification of her with Shakespeare, who was

“reputed witches”⁶¹ of the play (Griseld Bane, Mary Macmurren, and Elspy Low) recall the witches of *Macbeth*. Yet, the play’s “real witch,” Annabella actually bears a strong similarity to the villainous Lady Macbeth. Like Lady Macbeth, Annabella appears fairly innocent to most of the other characters, but the audience knows that both are scheming and vengeful. In many ways, Annabella is a revision of Lady Macbeth’s character. While Lady Macbeth is interested in both her own power and her husband’s power, Annabella takes action against Violet for her own individual pleasure. Lady Macbeth’s murderous plans succeed, while Annabella’s plans fail. However, Annabella remains visible at the end of the play where Lady Macbeth simply drops out of the action. In her famous final scene, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks across the stage while trying to remove an imagined stain of blood from her hand revealing the subconscious and uncontrollable guilt that takes over her mind and body. In last moments on stage, she cries, “To bed, to bed!... What’s done cannot be undone” (V.i.69-71). From this point forward, she is erased from the text. The audience’s focus is directed instead to Macbeth and the consequences of his actions, even though Lady Macbeth is often read as the true villain of the play.

Part of Lady Macbeth’s powerful presence in the throes of the play is that she is a sexualized figure, capable of engendering a bisexual gaze because she inhabits both masculine and feminine subject positions in her manipulation of Macbeth and even the audience. One of her most famous speeches involves her petitioning “spirits” to remove

himself becoming increasingly divorced from the stage by critics at this time, despite his theatrical popularity” (145). She points to the popular Romantic theory that “Seeing the plays staged was limiting since it provided the audience with a physical embodiment of a character in a situation, rather than allowing the imagination mentally to construct that character and situation for oneself in order to achieve empathy” (147).

⁶¹ This is Baillie’s language for categorizing the three women in her *Dramatis Personae* (340).

her womanliness and motherliness so that she is able to manipulate Macbeth into taking Duncan's life:

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remove,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry "Hold! hold!" (I.v. 40-55)

For audiences, this famous passage makes Lady Macbeth's guilt clear. She essentially asks to become a monster. Her incredibly beautiful and frightening speech indicates a strong desire to become "unsex[ed]" so that she has the capacity for murder. The emphasis on a desire to change in her sex and gender implies that those "compunctious

visitings of nature” prevent her from being a threat. These “visitings” are, of course, referring to any feelings of guilt she might experience or compassion for her victim that might seize her. In addition, the speech touches on themes of reproduction: Lady Macbeth offers to nurse the spirits in exchange for the nerve to murder (“Come to my woman’s breasts, / And take my milk for gall”). This theme is revisited just two scenes later when she admonishes Macbeth for not keeping his word: “How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me: / while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dash the brains out, had I so sworn as you / Have done to this” (I.vii.55-59). The mention of her “blood” in direct relation to the “visitings of nature” also recalls menstruation and the potential for reproduction. Asking to “make thick” her blood and offering to give her breast milk to the spirits indicates that Lady Macbeth wants to halt her reproductive ability and replace it with the ability to kill. Thus, her desire to be “unsex[ed]” is a call for the dissolution of her maternity, which she again emphasizes when she says she would kill her child if she swore she would. As an unsexed body, her body will become more powerful—capable to do what a sexed body cannot. And unsexing her body involves removing the possibility of producing an heir; thus, her unsexed body becomes threatening to Duncan, as her victim, even while it endangers the general patriarchal system upon which monarchy is built. Her goal is more likely to find power for herself than to place her husband in a position of power. The fluidity of sex is here demonized so heavily that it can only be accessed through a dark petition to become something monstrous. So the erasure of her body from the play represents the way Macbeth, as patriarch, consumes her sexually threatening energy by reasserting gender and heterosexual normativity. Shakespeare is able to focus the audience’s attention on the

patriarch, Macbeth, once the magnetic pull of Lady Macbeth's body no longer exists in the world of the play.

Baillie's Annabella, however, remains in the forefront of the drama even when she dies. Some of her last words reflect a determination in spite of guilt as she waits and watches for Violet's execution: "Now comes the fearful consummation!...Revenge is sweet; revenge is noble; revenge is natural; what price is too dear for revenge?—Why this tormenting commotion?...I will be firm and bold, in spite of human infirmity" (402). Annabella's aside reveals a Shakespearean revenge reimagined: even as her words recall Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking state of remorse, Annabella speaks while she is fully conscious. Unlike Lady Macbeth, Annabella is fully aware of her guilt *and* fully aware of dismissing any feelings of remorse in order to move forward with her revenge plot. In addition, Annabella once again reveals her desire for Violet in this aside. The use of the words "fearful consummation" connotes a sexual binding that she both fears and desires. Her attraction toward Violet intertwines with her desire to do Violet harm. Perhaps Annabella feels she must eradicate the person that is causing her this sexual confusion. Thus, she encourages herself to watch and enjoy Violet's execution despite a small notion (her "human infirmity") that her actions may be wrong. She does not succumb to guilt, as Lady Macbeth does; she does not lose herself to unconsciousness and oblivion. This is why her body remains visible while Lady Macbeth's body is erased from the text and the stage. When the Sheriff's officers hear Annabella's "shrieks" (408), they enter her hiding place and discover her body: "*the officers go into the house, and presently re-enter bearing the dead body of ANNABELLA, which they place on the front of the stage, the crowd gathering round to stare at it*" (409). Annabella's body remains on stage

throughout the conclusion of the play. When she is first brought out, her corpse is a spectacle for those that were gathered to see a witch burning. Although she is not burnt and the violence happens off-stage, both the on-stage crowd and the audience obtain the satisfaction of the expected witch burning displaced onto the dead body on stage. Annabella was the villain and her dead body on display next to Violet's alive and happy body indicates that justice triumphs.⁶² However, the corpse's presence also signifies Annabella's continuous visibility. Lady Macbeth disappears after she grapples with her feelings of guilt because she could arguably plead insanity—her mental state is not clear in her last monologue. But Annabella—though dead—remains on stage because she is conscious and sane throughout her admission of guilt. Annabella's body, along with its physical attraction for both Dungarren and Violet, is visible until the curtain drops. By emphasizing its villain's presence, the play draws our attention to the complexities of sexuality that cannot be erased, even in death.

In Baillie's *Witchcraft*, morality and desire are ambiguous. She refuses to exonerate Annabella, and instead allows the play to embrace messiness. Next to *Witchcraft*, *Macbeth* is slightly more straight-forward in its dealing with Lady Macbeth. As a villain, Lady Macbeth is a power-hungry woman willing to give up her female body in order to become monstrous. The play requires her to negotiate with spirits to obtain the murderous mindset she needs to even attempt to gain agency. Ultimately, even though her initial plans succeed, she is punished with madness and—much like what she desires to do with the imaginary spot—is rubbed out from the play. Her sexual ambiguity and

⁶² Marjean Purinton argues that Annabella's dead body reveals her true nature: "Like the Crown in Baillie's drama, we read the spectacular body of Annabella differently; we come to see her as a woman complicit in using the fear of witchcraft to serve her own selfish goals and to deflect attention from her own neurotic behaviors" ("Socialized and Medicalized Hysteria" 148).

ambition leads to the erasure of her body. Annabella's body, however, is present until the last moment of the play. Although she is arguably punished by fate for framing Violet, Baillie does not allow her to be forgotten. And unlike Lady Macbeth, Annabella already has the agency and power she needs to commit her murderous deed. She reaches out to Grizeld Bane through Black Bawldy, but she ultimately takes her own action—she is the one who rips the garment and places the piece in the plagued child's bed. She does not appeal to the devil, as the reputed witches do, and she does not go mad. She could arguably be insanely jealous, but Baillie does not give her the stereotypical signs of madness that Shakespeare gives to Lady Macbeth: talking to oneself, having hallucinations, and lacking rational transitions when speaking. Baillie presents us with a revised Lady Macbeth in Annabella. She is still a villain and still a representation of sexual ambiguity, but her body remains present for the audience. In the presence of that body, a physical symbol of fluidity remains visible. Sexual fluidity is not embraced—Annabella is dead, after all—but it is not dismissed either—as Lady Macbeth's unsexed body is.

VI. Conclusion: The Twenty-First Century Witch Hunt

Witchcraft reminds us that there are real, material consequences to our intangible identity labels: whether those consequences are the witch burnings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, decency trials of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or the hate crimes, emotional abuse, and cyber bullying of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These material consequences of performance perpetuate a culture of fear and

shame—one that contemporary audiences recognize clearly in Baillie’s play, because we still operate within that culture.

In the much beloved cult show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), Willow Rosenberg’s character (played by Alyson Hannigan) is a witch in Joss Whedon’s magical universe. Although the series begins with a timid, nerdy Willow who only expresses interest in men, her discovery of witchcraft is shortly accompanied by the discovery of her attraction to women. She meets her first female lover, Tara, at a Wicca group on a college campus and she and Tara fall in love while performing spells together. Some critics discuss the arc in Willow’s story as a turn from “straight” to “gay”; while others argue that she was a “lesbian” all along and that she realizes her “true” sexuality when she comes out in the fourth season. In most *Buffy* scholarship, critics use the word “lesbian” and “bisexual” interchangeably to describe Willow, and her character is rarely represented critically as anything but a moment of visibility for the LGBTQ community.⁶³ Reading Willow as previously straight and then gay, as a “true” lesbian, or even as bisexual, is an illustration of how concerned we have become with labeling characters. While fans enjoyed the arc of the show, they expressed an immediate and urgent need to confirm her identity.⁶⁴ In fact, Hannigan admits that she wants to know what to call Willow; in a magazine interview she says, “Right now, she is in love with Tara, who’s female, but I don’t know whether it means Willow’s gay. In fact—that’s what

⁶³ See, for example, Susan Driver’s *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media*, Alissa Wilt’s “Evil, Skanky, and Kinda Gay: Lesbian Images and Issues,” or Noelle R. Collier’s study “Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Xena: Warrior Princess: Reception of the Texts by a Sample of Lesbian Fans and Web Site Users.”

⁶⁴ Collier’s study explores how lesbian fans felt comforted by Willow and Tara’s relationship. One fan says, “I wanted desperately know that I wasn’t alone! I looked to W/T [Willow/Tara]...for guidance” (593). Another says watching Willow and Tara’s relationship “made me feel better, more normal” (594). The lesbian fan community used the label “lesbian” (594) to describe Willow right away, but Collier’s study reveals that this label stems more from the viewers’ perception than from the show’s depiction of Willow’s character.

I want to know....If she turns out to be gay then it's my belief that it's just the same as me growing up liking boys. It's just the way I'm built." While her comments are commendable in 2000, it is still troubling that Hannigan needs to place a label upon Willow. This quote is indicative of the societal obsession with sexuality labels. Rather than accept a fluid movement of sexuality, both fans and actress must know *what* Willow is.⁶⁵

Once she begins to use her magic for evil, Willow's witchcraft is a frustrating accompaniment to her sexuality for *Buffy* scholars. When Tara is murdered, Willow becomes full of anger and vengeance. She stops maintaining order and using her magic to help Buffy; instead, she begins to cause chaos and uses her magic to kill and destroy. She becomes "Dark Willow." The other characters on the show now think of her as "bad" because she is not just a lesbian witch, but also a lesbian witch who is actively trying to destroy symbols of masculine authority—such as the local police station. Willow's character transforms from painfully passive in the show's first season to dangerous, powerful, and aggressive near the end of the sixth season and through the entire final season. When her magic becomes powerful enough that she can fly through the air and flay a man alive, the show—via its heterosexual heroine, Buffy—must intervene to reinforce "good." Critics believe Willow's witchcraft negatively affects her lesbian identity; it turns her into a stereotype: Alissa Wilts argues, the trajectory of Willow's character "makes a connection between being evil and being a lesbian. Although this negative connotation was likely not intentional on the part of the *BtVS* [*Buffy the Vampire*

⁶⁵ Fan obsession with celebrity actresses' bodies is certainly not exclusive to the twenty-first century, as Joseph Roach famously shows in *It*. The "sacred and sexual celebrities" are "never entirely separable as objects of desire" (Roach 66). The obsession with Willow's body is a manifestation of Roach's "deep eighteenth century": "one that isn't over yet. It stays alive among us as a repertoire of long-running performances" (13).

Slayer] writers, such an implied connection perpetuates the harmful stereotype of predatory lesbians that has been repeatedly portrayed in film, television, and literature” (41). She also points out that even while Tara was alive, the Willow/Tara relationship’s “association with magic and the supernatural is problematic, and it serves to reinforce long-inscribed homophobic assumptions that lesbians are dangerous, transgressive, and mysterious beings outside of normal society” (41). Willow represents the dangers of female love. There are three glaring problems with Hannigan’s comments and *Buffy* scholarship on the Willow/Tara storyline. First, the word “gay” does not accurately describe a female character that is attracted to both men and women. Second, the word “lesbian” and references to Willow as a representation of lesbianism on screen disregard Willow’s clear attraction to men. Third, the labels of sexuality are insufficient for the complexities of her sexual feelings and behaviors. Even critics who use the word bisexual to describe Willow are clearly uncertain about the term. In the twenty-first century, we still have trouble finding the right words to describe a sexually fluid character—one that does not definitively identify with any particular sexual label. We are uncomfortable with that state of flux and thus attempt to pin down challenging concepts with inadequate and inaccurate labels. If we examine witchcraft and female sexuality alongside one another, the consequences of the witch label become a convincing illustration of the consequences of the lesbian or bisexual label. The action of defining sexual behavior and doggedly searching for sexual labels to place upon characters becomes akin to a witch hunt.

This eighteenth-century portrayal of a witch hunt becomes familiar to twentieth-century audiences when we speak in terms of stigma and labels in the context of the word “bisexual.” Like Violet, Annabella, or Willow, people—particularly women—who are

sexually ambiguous are looked on with suspicion. In 2015, I would argue that it is the inability to categorize and place a label upon a body that most disturbs a heteronormative mindset. For a brief example, I turn to one particularly timely figure: Hillary Rodham Clinton. During her time as First Lady, her masculine pantsuits signified her as hard and aggressive. Some read her as a lesbian while others believed she had “some sort of extraordinary sexual power over President [Clinton]” (Templin 25). The discussions of Hillary Clinton’s sexuality that began to circulate in earnest in the 90’s continued in 2008’s political commentary when she ran in the primary race for the Democratic presidential nomination. The fear Republicans had over her coming so close to the presidency was loudly expressed, and her political ideas were overshadowed by discussions about her sexuality. In September 2013, one of Bill Clinton’s supposed former mistresses claimed that he told her Hillary Clinton was bisexual. This led several conservative media outlets to ask, “Will Hillary Clinton be our first lesbian president?” Apart from the frustrating conflation of the words ‘bisexual’ and ‘lesbian,’ I would like to suggest that what’s more telling about these attacks on Clinton is the obsessive way the media tries to pin her down. There is a constant desire to discover the “truth” about her sexuality. Just as Violet is unable to escape the label of “witch,” Clinton is unable to escape the label “bisexual” or “lesbian.” These words have become a permanent part of public discussions about her and have affected her political career. In building her public image, she must constantly work against those material consequences of public speculation.

In his fascinating book, *Shakespearean Afterlives*, John O’Connor writes, “It is curious that, of all the things Lady Macbeth might have become famous for in the four

centuries since her first appearance—blood-soaked palms, sleep-walking, self-destruction—the one that has captured the media’s imagination most vividly is the notion that she plays the determined, manipulative wife behind the ambitious yet weak man” (178). O’Connor not only confirms the way critics and readers color Lady Macbeth as the evil figure of the play, but he finds contemporary references to her character in the media. Strong female figures like Hilary Clinton and Cherie Blair, wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, are compared to Lady Macbeth because they take active roles in politics instead of behaving as submissive women to their husbands’ powerful positions. This, for O’Connor, is a reflection of a critical and cultural misstep. He argues that Lady Macbeth’s perceived villainy both “helps perpetuate a distortion of the character who appears in Shakespeare’s play” and “implies a deep-rooted misogyny, the male fear of the powerful woman” (186). I would add to this: the fear of Lady Macbeth and characters like her also implies a fear of women whose sexuality is not clearly identified. This comparison of Lady Macbeth to Clinton reveals the anxieties that, even four hundred years after *Macbeth*, are attached to women in power. The consistent attempts to demonize powerful women in politics like Hilary Clinton and Cherie Blair is evidence of the lingering patriarchal nature of Western society. Interestingly, as is seen with the media’s portrayal of Clinton, this anxiety is often played out in a discussion of a powerful woman’s sexuality. To discredit a powerful woman, the public questions her sexuality and gender. They paint her as hard, emasculating, and sexually deviant. As a result, non-heteronormative sexuality and fluid sexuality become a means for insult. The process by which the public’s fear of women in power and politics translates to questions of sexuality serves to highlight the public’s fear of non-heteronormative and fluid sexuality.

At the heart of Baillie's *Witchcraft* is a fear of that which humanity cannot fully understand. In her introduction to a collection of Baillie's Gothic dramas, Christine Colón suggests that the real danger depicted in *Witchcraft* is political and economic: "Baillie reveals that while individuals may fear visitation by witches, ghostly apparitions, and supernatural storms, the real dangers may actually lie in the mundane world of economics and politics" (xxxiv). And I would take this one step further: the danger—particularly for women—in eighteenth-century Gothic drama and in twenty-first century politics lies in the requirement to label. The characters in *Witchcraft* and the media who discuss Clinton all experience confusion over their perception of a particular woman, and *a woman marked by uncertainty is never free of suspicion*. In this project, I use the words bisexual, queer, fluid, and ambiguous to describe the female sexuality I read in Charke's *Narrative*, Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and Baillie's *Witchcraft*, but I know these are not the best terms. Rather than attempting to discover the right word to describe women who are attracted to multiple sexes or who *are accused of being so* (like Clinton), perhaps it would be better to question the *burning* desire to label a woman's sexual behavior in order to satisfy a psychological need to neatly categorize a woman's sexual behavior. This process of searching for labels to explain ambiguous sexual behavior is in itself a kind of witch hunt. One that only becomes satisfied at the application of a label and one that endangers our ability to sit with the fluidity and uncertainty of female sexuality.

This chapter has examined the queer possibilities in Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*. In addition to drawing parallels between the process of a witch hunt and the process of trying to affix a particular body with a specific sexuality label, I looked at other labels—such as spinster—that could potentially lead to material consequences. Particularly

because of her singleness, Baillie had to actively cultivate her image in order to present herself as the right kind of single elderly woman. While she was never accused of witchcraft, Baillie's age, marital status, success, and creativity would have made her seem suspicious if she had been born just a hundred or so years earlier. When she read Walter Scott's *Bride of Lamermore*, it was the scene with the Hags that drew her to write about witchcraft. Perhaps the painting that depicted her friend, Anne Damer, as one of the *Witches 'Round the Cauldron* in 1775 was in the back of her mind when she read the novel published by another friend and fellow author, Scott, in 1819. Though the two works were created over forty years apart, both represent angles of witchcraft that Baillie incorporates into her play. The painting depicts a young, beautiful, sexually aggressive witch that can be found in Annabella's character. The novel's witches are older and pitiable, and their characteristics appear in Grizeld Bane and the reputed witches. The falsely accused witch, Violet, adds to the multiple facets of the witch figure that Baillie gives her readers. And all three types of witches carry the weight of questionable female sexuality. When this play was published in 1836, Baillie intended it for performance but was unsure whether anyone would be willing to help her stage it. The drama became increasingly obscure as it waited patiently in the closet until its twenty-first-century debut performance.

While this work seems important in the realms of late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century studies as well as studies of the history of witches and witchcraft, scholars have largely ignored it until the last two decades. This could be the result of Baillie's lengthy, philosophical and sometimes convoluted dialogue—a common criticism of her work. But we could also attribute this lack of interest and audience to a

burying of the sexually ambiguous woman that is emblematic of the Victorian era. Nineteenth-century sexuality studies should not be discounted; a great deal of scholarship has shown that the Victorians were not nearly as conservative or sexually frustrated as twentieth-century Modernists would have us believe. However, the few texts I look at in my project as well as the wealth of mid-to-late-eighteenth-century novels, plays, and memoirs that I did not address depict a trend of increasingly obscured sexual fluidity. While Charke's *Narrative* portrayed her moving through life with a relatively free-flowing fluidity, Austen's *Mansfield Park* suggests that sexual fluidity is present but halted and inaccessible. Baillie's *Witchcraft* kills off the sexually ambiguous character in addition to ensuring that any other questions about characters' potentially deviant sexuality are answered with simple explanations of misunderstandings. Sexual fluidity appears to have been buried as the century progressed.

VII. Bisexuality, Fluidity, and the Messiness of Desire

This project has considered the similarities between representations of sexuality in a number contemporary texts and figures and eighteenth-century texts. Even as I use Charke, Austen, and Baillie to trace the obscuring of sexual fluidity through the eighteenth century, I also demonstrate the value of developing a lens in which the present reaches into the past and subsequently allows for exciting readings of texts from both the twenty-first and eighteenth centuries. We have seen how twenty-first-century trajectories of desire, though not completely free of condemnation, are much more willing to be fluid. Figures such as Lady Gaga, Embeth Davidtz's Mary Crawford, and Willow Rosenberg from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, all shift positions of subjectivity within the realms of

sexuality and gender. Through queer notions of time, examining these twenty-first-century representations of fluid female sexuality creates new insights into eighteenth-century literature. Viewing Charke's *Narrative*, Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and Baillie's *Witchcraft* through the lens of twenty-first-century sexuality studies sparks our imagination and allows us to consider the ways in which sexuality of the eighteenth century was less stable than it appears. This way of reading texts follows the example of what Halberstam calls "a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity" (quot. in Freeman "Theorizing Queer" 182). Instead of considering how female sexuality developed over the course of a heteronormative version of a life, this project uses queer temporalities to destabilize linear sexuality and even the historical separation of sexualities.

The sexual revivals of the Modernists, the 'free-love' movement of the 1960s, and the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s all contributed to the process of unearthing female sexuality. In the past two decades, pop culture of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which gave us Lady Gaga, Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, has been digging female sexual fluidity out of its shallow grave. The bisexual woman has gained ground in the fight against stigmas of promiscuity and indecisiveness. Though she still has a long way to go to gain respect in theoretical scholarship, the bisexual woman is finding space to breathe in twenty-first-century society. However, she still lacks the ability to maneuver fluidly through sexuality. Despite the strides made in acceptance of same-sex relationships alongside heterosexual ones, bisexual women are too often depicted as choosing one sex or another. For example, the

popular, controversial series *Orange is the New Black* (2013-present) produced by Jenji Kohan features a main character, Piper Chapman, who goes into prison engaged to a man and in a short span of time gets back together with her ex-“lesbian lover.” Her fiancé, her family, and even Piper herself now identify her as someone who may have been straight at one time but is now a lesbian.

In the final season of *Parenthood* (2010-2015) produced by Ron Howard, a milder and more family-friendly show than *Orange*, young Haddie Braverman goes off to college and falls in love with another woman. The show commendably (but questionably) treats her “coming out” as “no big deal.” Her parents tell her they just want her to be happy and it is only her cousin, of roughly the same age, who straight-forwardly asks her, “What does this mean?” The writers do not allow Haddie to speak the word “bisexual”; instead, she says she does not know how to categorize herself and she does not want to categorize herself. On the one hand, I applaud the writers of *Parenthood* for resisting the trap of affixing labels to sexual fluidity. On the other hand, the stigmas of promiscuity and indecisiveness are why they most likely avoided calling Haddie bisexual. After all, she is supposed to be a representation of a “normal” young woman who is simply opening herself up to new experiences. Once she goes back to college and this story line wraps up, we never hear about her love life again. The implication seems to be that she will move beyond her college experimentation, marry a man, and carry on the Braverman gene pool (the show is in many ways about patriarchal lineage). The implication of her storyline’s direction—the way they allow her to quietly fade into the background of heteronormativity—does not fully address the question of fluidity. Though these twenty-

first-century shows, and others like it, engage with queerness, they still maintain the pattern of queer scholarship—they do not specifically acknowledge bisexuality.

This project has tried to exist in a paradox: one that both attempts to bring visibility to bisexuality while simultaneously suggesting sexuality labels can be extremely unhelpful. I have considered and used sexual fluidity as a term even while undermining that phrase by arguing that umbrella terms decrease visibility. I began by admitting that bisexuality, as a term, can be both helpful and, at times, harmful. Because of its ‘bi’ prefix, it implies that there are only two sexes and two genders. However, the reality of bisexuality is much more complex than a simple turning of the head from left to right (or from male to female). Trajectories of desire are nuanced and messy. And the changeableness of eighteenth-century literature and culture make that messiness evident. But rather than shy away from this mess or try and tidy it underneath the blanket of “queerness,” I suggest we dive in and embrace the complexities of bisexuality and sexual fluidity.

Through this project, I have opened up a discussion about fluid desire in the eighteenth-century through an examination of fluid desire in the twenty-first century. I have grappled with the term “bisexuality” in order to highlight a problematic polarity in gender and sexuality—the perceived divide between hetero and homo, between masculine and feminine, and even between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. The term has also allowed me to consider the messy reality of the space that exists between the polarities, particularly sexuality that is neither heterosexual nor homosexual. My hope is that this project expands notions of female sexuality as fluid without anchoring us to a specific terminology. Though representations of fluid sexuality does fade as the century

progresses, it can still be found in Charke, Austen, and Baillie's texts. In addition, we can find similar representations of fluidity in twenty-first century figures and works. The comparison of the two explodes the idea that sexuality must be relegated to a historical framework. The physical bodies that exist in the eighteenth century are still existing now. They are both in their own time and they can be brought forward, or we can reach back, through the understanding that time and sexuality are fluid. Although these theories about bisexuality, the gaze, and queer time are by no means definitive, my hope is that as we further study eighteenth-century sexuality, we are able to incorporate twenty-first century ideas into our thought process and that, as a result, our studies will continue to explore how erotic bodies and trajectories of desire within the eighteenth century extend beyond their time and beyond our expectations.

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